

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY
C. ARTHUR PEARSON

(OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 376.

FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 14TH, 1896.

[ONE PENNY.]

1896 PROCLAMATION.

Grand Pioneer Reduction Sale

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, The Well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement.

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7ft. by 9ft. " " " "	5/11	12ft. by 13ft. " " " "	12/9
8ft. by 9ft. " " " "	7/6	12ft. by 13ft. " " " "	14/6
8ft. by 10ft. " " " "	8/6	12ft. by 15ft. " " " "	15/9
8ft. by 12ft. " " " "	9/6	12ft. by 15ft. " " " "	19/6
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COUPON.

No. II

Mar. 14, 1896.

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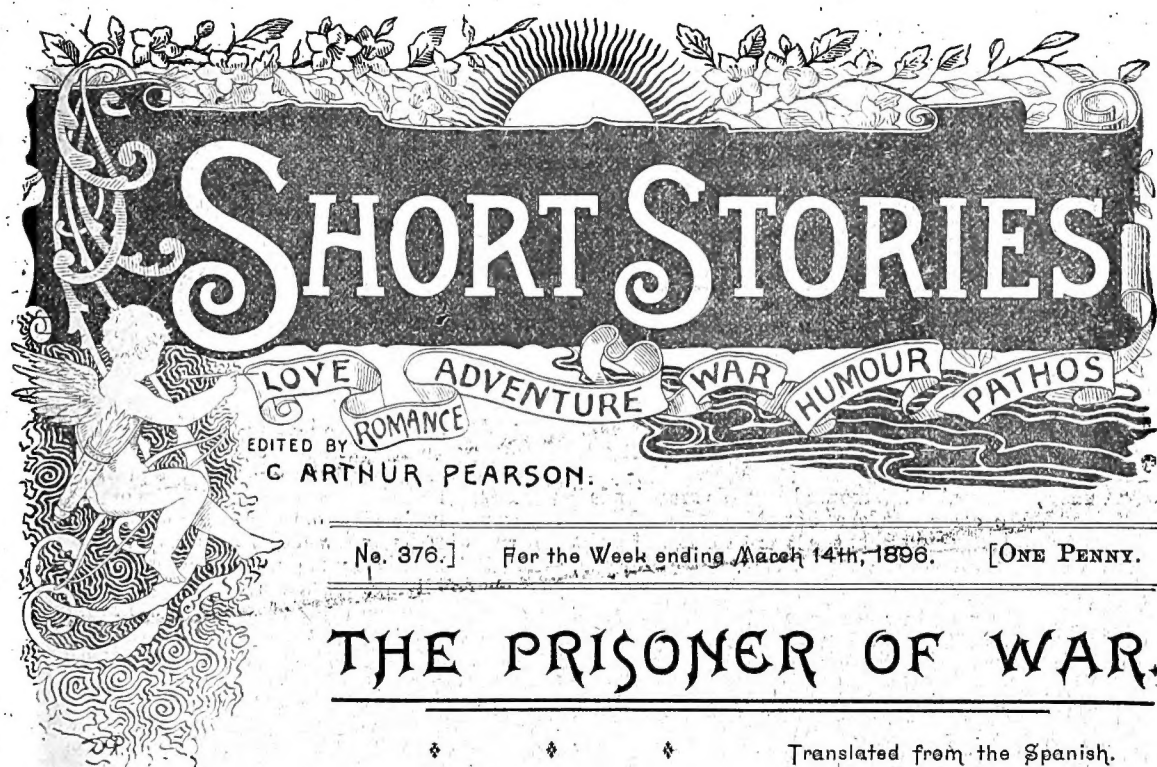
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SHORT STORIES

LOVE ROMANCE ADVENTURE WAR HUMOUR PATHOS

EDITED BY
C ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 376.] For the Week ending March 14th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

THE PRISONER OF WAR.

Translated from the Spanish.

“DON BASILIO, play us a tune on the cornet, and we will dance. It is cool here under the trees.”

“Yes, yes, Don Basilio, play something.”

“Bring him the cornet Joaquin is practising with.”

“It is not a very good one, but you’ll play for us, will you not, Don Basilio?”

“No.”

“You won’t?”

“No.”

“But why?”

“Because I don’t know how.”

“He doesn’t know how! Did you ever see such a hypocrite?”

“Come, come, Don Basilio. Why, we know you’ve been leader of a military band.”

“And that nobody could play the cornet like yourself.”

“And that you have a pension from the government.”

“Well, yes, it’s truth. I have been a musician in my time, and the cornet was the instrument I played; but it is also true that years ago I gave my cornet away to a poor player in need of one, and since that time have not so much as hummed a tune.”

“What a pity!”

“Oh, but this afternoon you must play for us.”

“Remember it is my birthday, grandpapa.”

“And here is the cornet at last.”

“Now let’s have a pretty tune.”

“A waltz?”

“No, a polka!”

“No, no; a fandango, a fandango—our national dance.”

“Don’t bother me, children. Have I not said that I cannot play?”

“But why can’t you?”

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“Because I’ve forgotten the way, and because, moreover, I have vowed never to learn again.”

“To whom did you make this vow, father?”

“To myself, to a dead friend, and to your poor mother, my daughter.”

All the bright, childish faces grew sad upon hearing these words.

“Oh, if you only knew at what cost I learnt to play the cornet!” continued the old man.

“The story! the story!” exclaimed the children.

“Tell us a story.”

“Well, yes,” said Don Basilio, “it is really a story worth telling. Listen, and you shall judge for yourselves whether I can or cannot play for you to-day.”

And seating himself under a tree, surrounded by the wondering children, he told them the story of how he learnt to play the cornet. Let us listen to Don Basilio.

It is now seventeen years ago that our beloved Spain was shaken by civil war. Carlos and Isabel disputed the crown, and our countrymen, divided into two factions, shed their blood in fratricidal conflict.

I had in those days a friend named Ramon Gomez, cavalry lieutenant in the same battalion, one of the best hearted fellows I have ever known. We were educated together; together we left college; together had we passed many happy days, and together we were ready to die for liberty. Oh, I can truly say that he was more attached to the Liberal cause than any of us, and his loyalty was never questioned. Yet, even so, a certain injustice committed by our chief, one of those abuses of authority that wreck the most honourable career, made the cavalry lieutenant desert the ranks of his fellow soldiers, the friend leave his friend, the Liberal abandon

his cause for that of a hated faction, the subordinate desire to kill his superior officer.

Neither my warnings nor my intreaties availed to dissuade him from this rash step. It was a thing decided. He would change the helmet for the cap, despising, as he did, the rebels and their cause.

At that time we found ourselves in the principality of L—, three miles from the enemy. It was the night in which Ramon was to desert—a cheerless evening, cold and wet, on the eve of a battle. At midnight Ramon entered my tent. I was asleep.

"Basilio," he whispered in my ear.

"Who's there?" I asked, waking with a start.

"It is I. Good-bye."

"You are going already?"

"Yes. Good-bye." And he grasped my hand. "Listen," he continued. "If to-morrow there is a great battle, as is the rumour, and we come face to face in it—"

"I know, I know," I interrupted. "We are friends."

"Good. We clasp hands, and fight afterwards. I shall die to-morrow surely, but not until I have fought my way to the side of the lieutenant-colonel. As for you, Basilio, do not expose yourself."

"Glory is but a vapour."

"And life?"

"Well said. Make yourself a commandant. The pay is not ethereal—that is, not till one has smoked it away. Ah, but all that has now ended for me."

"What melancholy thoughts!" I cried, not without a sinking at the heart. "To-morrow we shall survive the battle."

"Well, if this be so, let us now appoint a meeting place."

"Where?"

"In the hermitage of St. Nicholas at one o'clock to-morrow night. He who is not there by that time shall be given up for dead by the other. Is it agreed?"

"Agreed."

"Well, then, good-bye."

"Good-bye."

We embraced affectionately and parted, Ramon disappearing under shelter of the darkness.

* * * * *

As we had expected, the rebels attacked us the following day. The action was a bloody one, and lasted from three o'clock in the afternoon until nightfall. About five o'clock my battalion was roughly set upon by a party of Alaveses led by Ramon. He then wore the uniform and decorations of a commandant, and on his head was the white cap of the Carlists. I ordered my company to fire upon Ramon's forces. He retaliated, and soon our battalions were engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle. We were victorious, and Ramon was forced to retreat with the scattered remnants of his band, not, however, before he had slain with his own hand our lieutenant-colonel, who opposed a desperate but vain resistance to the fury of his antagonist.

Towards sunset the fortunes of war turned against us, and part of my unfortunate company was, with myself, cut off from the main body and forced to surrender. I was taken prisoner to the little village of—, which the Carlists occupied, and as the war was without quarter on their side I expected to be immediately put to death.

While confined, disheartened and weary, in the gaol I heard the hour of one ring out, the time for my meeting with Ramon. I asked for my friend, and was told: "He is a hero—killed a lieutenant-colonel with his own

hand—but he must undoubtedly have perished in the last hours of battle."

"Why do you think so?" I asked.

"Because he has not yet come back to camp, and those he commanded can give no account of him."

Oh! what I suffered that night. But one hope remained to comfort me—that Ramon was still awaiting me at the hermitage, and for this reason had not returned. "How troubled he will be when he finds I do not come!" I said to myself. "He will believe me dead, and, indeed, am I very far from being so? My last hour cannot now be far distant." At daybreak a chaplain entered the prison. My companions in misery were sleeping.

"Death?" I exclaimed upon seeing the priest.

"Yes," he replied softly.

"Now?" I asked.

"No; within three hours."

A few minutes later my fellow prisoners had awakened. Sobs, cries, and blasphemies filled the prison.

Every man about to die usually has one idea that is ever present in his thoughts and to which he clings. So it was with me, and weakness, fever, or madness, I know not which, filled my mind with thoughts of my friend—of Ramon living, of Ramon dead, of Ramon waiting for me in the hermitage, of Ramon waiting for me in Heaven—and so powerfully had those ideas taken possession of my mind that I thought of nothing else during those hours of agony.

They took off my captain's uniform and wrapped me in an old soldier's cloak, placing upon my head the Carlist cap. Thus I marched to my death with my nineteen companions in misery. One only had been pardoned, and this because he was a musician. The Carlists at that time spared the lives of all musicians on account of there being a great scarcity of them in their battalions.

"And were you a musician, Don Basilio? Did you save yourself by that?" exclaimed his hearers with one breath.

"No, my children," responded the veteran. "I then knew nothing of music."

Well, the execution squad drew up in line, and we were placed facing it. I was No. 11 in the row—that is to say, I should be the eleventh to die. Then I thought of my wife and child—of you and your poor mother, my daughter.

The firing began. Those awful death volleys maddened me. As my eyes were bandaged, I could not see my companions fall one by one. I wished to count the discharges, so as to be able to prepare myself for the last moment, but at the third or fourth volley I lost count.

Oh, the echo of those shots will reverberate in my heart and brain for ever as they rang out that fatal day! At one moment they were a thousand leagues away; the next, their thunder seemed to peal within my very ear. And the volley continued.

"Now!" I thought. The sharp report followed, and I was still alive.

"This will be it," I said, and then I felt myself seized by the shoulder, and dragged out of the ranks, while voices sounded in my ears.

I fell unconscious to the ground, the last thought that passed through my mind being that I had been shot and was dying.

Afterwards it seemed to me that I was lying stretched on my prison cot. I half raised myself and looked around me, trying to pierce the darkness with my eyes. A shadow more obscure than the others appeared to,

detach itself and bend over me. It had the outline of a man.

My lips murmured mechanically the name of him who had been so much in my thoughts.

"Ramon!"

"What is it?" replied the shadow.

I shuddered. "My God!" I exclaimed. "Can I be in the other world?"

"No," replied the same voice.

"Ramon—you still live?"

"Yes."

"And I——"

"Also."

"Where am I? This is not the hermitage of St. Nicholas, and I still live a prisoner, or has it all been a dream?"

"No, Basilio, you have not been dreaming. Listen!"

"As you know, yesterday I killed the lieutenant-colonel in fair fight. Afterwards, mad with the excitement of the battle, I went on fighting desperately until the close of the action. Then as the moon rose, I thought of you and of our appointment, and directed my steps to the old hermitage, with the intention of awaiting you there. It was about ten o'clock when I arrived, so, as the house agreed upon was one, I lay down to sleep. At the stroke of one I awoke with a start to find myself alone. Two, three, four, the hours rang out, and still you did not come. Without doubt, I said to myself, he is dead, and with a heavy heart I set out at daybreak for the rebel camp. All had given me up for lost, so I was received with joy, and the General showered distinction upon me.

"Afterwards I learnt that some prisoners were to be executed that morning. A presentiment filled my mind. 'Can Basilio be among them?' I thought. I ran towards the place of execution. The soldiers of the firing squadron had already taken their position. I heard the report of the rifles as they rang out in volleys on the still morning air.

"At length I reach the scene, and look rapidly along the line of victims, but can see nothing. Anguish blinds me; fear unnerves me. Then I distinguish you but two places removed from that of death! What is to be done? I go mad, give a shout, break through the line of soldiers, and rush to your side, and flinging my arms around you, exclaimed hoarsely:

"This one—no! This one—no, my general!"

"The general who was in charge of the execution, and who knew me so favourably by my behaviour in the previous day's battle, asked curiously:

"Why? Is he a musician?"

"That word was for me what it would be for a man born blind to suddenly see the sun in all its splendour. The light of hope fell on my eyes and dazzled them.

"Musician!" I cried. "Yes, yes, my general. A musician—a great musician!"

"What instrument does he play?" inquired the General.

"The—the—er—that is—why, of course, the cornet! He plays the cornet."

"Are we in need of a cornet player?" said he, turning to the leader of the band. Five seconds—five eternities, before the answer came:

"Yes, General; one is needed."

"Well, then," continued the General, "remove that man from the ranks, and let the executions proceed at once."

"Then I caught you in my arms and brought you here."

Scarcely had Ramon ceased speaking when I arose, trembling, and between laughter and tears embraced him, saying:

"I owe my life to you."

"Hardly that," replied Ramon.

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed.

"Can you play the cornet?" he asked.

"No."

"Then you do not owe me your life; rather it is that I have compromised my own safety without securing yours."

I felt my heart grow cold within me.

"And music," he continued, "do you know anything of that?"

"Very little. You will remember what they taught us in college."

"Little, indeed, or, better said, nothing," replied Ramon; "you will die, without the slightest doubt, and I also as a traitor. Just think of that! In fifteen days the band to which you belong is to be organised."

"Fifteen days!"

"Neither more nor less. And as you will not be able to take your place in it (for God will not work a miracle) we shall both be shot."

"To put you to death!" I cried. "You, for my sake—for me, whom you have risked your life to save! Ah, heaven will not permit it! Within fifteen days I shall learn to play the cornet!"

Ramon burst into a laugh.

"What more shall I say, my children? In fifteen days—oh, power of the human will—in fifteen days, with their fifteen nights—for I slept no more than nature compelled in half a month—in fifteen days I had learned to play the cornet.

What days those were! Ramon and I left camp early each morning and passed hours with a musician who came from a neighbouring village to teach me.

Escape! I can read this thought in your eyes. Ah, nothing more impossible. I was a prisoner. They never relaxed their vigilance, and Ramon did not wish to escape without me.

It seems to me now as if in all that time I could neither eat nor sleep nor think of aught save my cornet. I was insane, and music was my monomania.

I was resolved to learn, and I did. And if I had been dumb I should have spoken; and paralytic, I should have walked; and blind, should have seen—because I willed it.

Oh! the will answers for all. Resolution is power. Children, learn this great truth—to will is to achieve.

I saved thus my life and that of my friend. But I went mad, and my madness was the art I had learned. It might be said that in three years the cornet never left my hand. Do—re—mi—fa—sol—la—si—behold my world during that time.

But Ramon did not abandon me. Together we emigrated to France, and there I continued my playing. The cornet was myself—it seemed to ring in my mouth.

The people, the notabilities in the art, all gathered to hear me. It was a wonder, a marvel. The cornet seemed to yield to my fingers, it became elastic, it moaned, it wept, it cried aloud, it imitated the birds, the wild beasts, the human sob.

Thus passed two years more. At the end of that time Ramon died. Gazing upon my friend's dead body I recovered my reason, and when, then in my right mind, I one day took up the cornet and tried to play, I found to my astonishment that the power had left me.

Will you now ask me to play a tune for your dance?



THE TIN BOX.

HENRY DYSON was alone in the little office at the back end of his shop.

Mr. Dyson was a pleasant-looking man of about thirty-five or forty, and his fellow townsmen frequently pointed to him with pride as a self-made business man.

But while everybody had a good word for Henry Dyson, very few people spoke well of his brother Tom.

On the night our story opens the merchant was waiting for his graceless brother, and as the hours rolled on the frown on his face grew deeper.

"I can do nothing with Tom," he said, as he paced the floor impatiently. "I have given him every possible chance, but he grows more idle and dissipated every day. Perhaps I ought not to wait for him, but he was so urgent in his request for an interview to-night that I could not refuse. Poor fellow! What new trouble can he be mixed up in?"

The front door opened and a young man entered quietly, and after a furtive glance round the shop proceeded to the office.

"Well, Tom?" said Henry Dyson.

"I am here, you see," replied Tom.

"I suppose," said Henry, "that it is useless to ask why you are so late, or where you have been during the last two days?"

Tom looked a little nervous, and his eyes fell.

"That is neither here nor there," he answered in a swaggering way. "I have had some business of my own to look after, and I knew that you were not short of help in the shop."

"Well, what is it?" asked Henry abruptly.

"Brother," Tom broke out hurriedly and in a faltering voice, "I must have some money, fifty pounds or so."

"I wonder where you will get it," Henry rejoined. "You will not get another penny from me—that is certain. Why should I toil here and economise in order to furnish you with funds to be lost at the gaming table?"

"If I do not get this money," said Tom, turning very pale, "I shall have to leave the country."

"A good thing for the country, then," snapped Henry. "Don't let me interfere with your travelling plans."

Tom seemed to fall all to pieces at this reply. He made one more effort.

"I hope you are not hard up yourself?" he said.

"I was never getting along better," responded the merchant, "but that has nothing to do with the case."

He pulled open the door of the iron safe and pointed to a little tin box.

"Do you see that?" he asked. "Well that box contains twenty crisp £100 bank-notes. I drew the money from the bank to-day for an investment. No, Tom, I am prospering, but I am tired of your endless drain upon my purse. It must stop, and now is the time."

Henry rose from his chair, and went into a little closet for his overcoat.

In an instant, before a man could count three seconds, Tom had drawn the flat tin box from the safe, and slipped it into the breast of his heavy overcoat.

His brother slowly emerged from the closet and put on his overcoat. Then he closed the door of the safe with a click.

"I am ready to go," he said. "You have no further business with me, I presume?"

"No, sir," Tom responded, with a pale, determined face. "Neither now nor later; good-bye."

"Good-bye, old fellow," said Henry with a yawn.

Tom walked out of the shop without another word, banging the door after him.

"I know him," soliloquised the merchant. "He will not leave here. He will be here to-morrow, with a new proposition. Perhaps, after all, I had better look into his affairs, and give him another chance."

He walked slowly out of the building and looked the door. A glance up and down the street showed him that Tom was not in sight, and he then quietly made his way to his home, and straightway went to bed.

After leaving the shop Tom hugged the tin box to his breast, and walked at a rapid pace.

"It was an awful thing to do," he muttered, "but I had to have money, and I worked to make some of it."

The young man sped onwards through the deserted streets until he reached the river. He crossed the bridge and started up the hill on the other side.

His plan was plain enough. He was going to a suburban railway station to take the train for Southampton.

Suddenly he pulled up with a jerk. He took the tin box from under his coat.

"Hang it!" he exclaimed. "I must have been mad. I am no thief, and I will cut my throat before I will become one. There is but one thing to do. I will

take the box back to my brother, confess my folly, and then leave him."

He turned and retraced his steps. When he reached the bridge he paused a moment, and looked over into the dark waters below.

"I may find peace there," he said gloomily.

He leant over the railing, and listened to the swift rolling current.

"My God!" he cried. "The box—the box!"

It had slipped through his fingers, and already the rushing waters were carrying it to the sea.

Tom ran in the direction of his brother's house, and then wheeled about and ran back to the bridge. His first impulse was to throw himself into the river.

"I am a fool!" he cried. "Suicide will not restore the money. I must be a man now if there is any manhood in me!"

Across the river and over the hill into the thick darkness of the night the guilty fugitive fled. Mile after mile he walked like a madman. The lights of the city disappeared from view, and Tom found himself wandering in an unfamiliar locality.

Again the river came in sight, and the wretched man decided to follow its course. It was not far to the sea. He would go on to the nearest port and ship as a sailor. Anything to get beyond his brother's reach and the eyes of those who knew him.

Thus the light of day found him, but it was not likely that anyone along the river side would recognise him. There were few dwellings, and the people he met were farmers, who were not disposed to be unpleasantly inquisitive.

So the half-crazed man rushed on through the day, till at nightfall he limped wearily into a small seaport town.

* * * * *

Henry Dyson made every effort to find his missing brother. When he thought of the pained look in Tom's eyes the night the poor fellow left, he reproached himself for allowing him to go away without a kind word of encouragement.

The detectives took the matter up, and the newspapers published an account of Tom's mysterious disappearance. But it was all of no avail. There was no trace, no clue, and after a year or two the merchant came to the conclusion that his brother was a dead man.

Henry Dyson continued to prosper. He married happily, and in the course of time little children came to make his home still brighter.

Twenty years had rolled away, when one night the merchant found himself alone in his office writing a letter.

As he leant back in his chair to take a moment's rest, he thought of the night a score of years before when Tom had visited him there to make a last appeal. Tears came into the rich man's eyes.

"He was my own brother," he sobbed, "and I acted like a brute. How easy it would have been for me to have paid his little debts. Then I could have watched

over him, and in time my love would have touched his heart, and he would have turned out all right. But it is too late now to think of those days."

The door opened with hardly a creak, and the merchant would not have known it but for the rush of cool air. He rose from his chair just in time to greet a visitor who walked into the office without even a knock on the door to herald his approach.

Henry Dyson looked upon him in speechless astonishment. If he could trust his eyes this was Tom Dyson, but not the Tom of twenty years ago. He was an old man with a wrinkled face and white hair.

"Brother," said the visitor, holding out his hand, "are you glad to see me?"

With a joyous exclamation the other caught him in his embrace, and then seated him in a chair.

"This is a glad hour for me, Tom," he said. "I had given you up for dead, and I have all these years been reproaching myself for my harshness to you that night, you know."

"Hold on!" cried the other excitedly. "You must not overwhelm me with kindness until I have made restitution. Here in this package you will find the sum I took from the safe in the little tin box. It has taken me these twenty years to make it, but here it is at last."

"But I do not understand," interrupted Henry.

"Oh, but you must," replied his brother. "When you turned away to get your coat that night, I slipped the box out of the safe and concealed it. Then you closed the safe, unconscious of your loss, and I left you."

"But the box was empty!" shouted Henry.

"Impossible!" answered Tom, "for you told me that it contained £2,000. Well, I rushed off with the box, but repented, and was on my way to return it when I carelessly let it slip into the water when I crossed the river. Now you know why I ran away and concealed myself. I had but one object—to make enough money to pay you back, and then I would ask your forgiveness."

"Oh, how foolish!" said Henry. "Why, man, I found in the morning that my bookkeeper had taken the money from the box and carried it back to the bank that afternoon when he found that I was not going to use it until the next day. I missed the empty box, but I never connected that with your disappearance."

"Then this money—"

"Is yours," said Henry. "But even if you had lost my money, as you supposed, you should have come back to me. I sometimes talked roughly to you, but you ought to have known how I loved you, Tom."

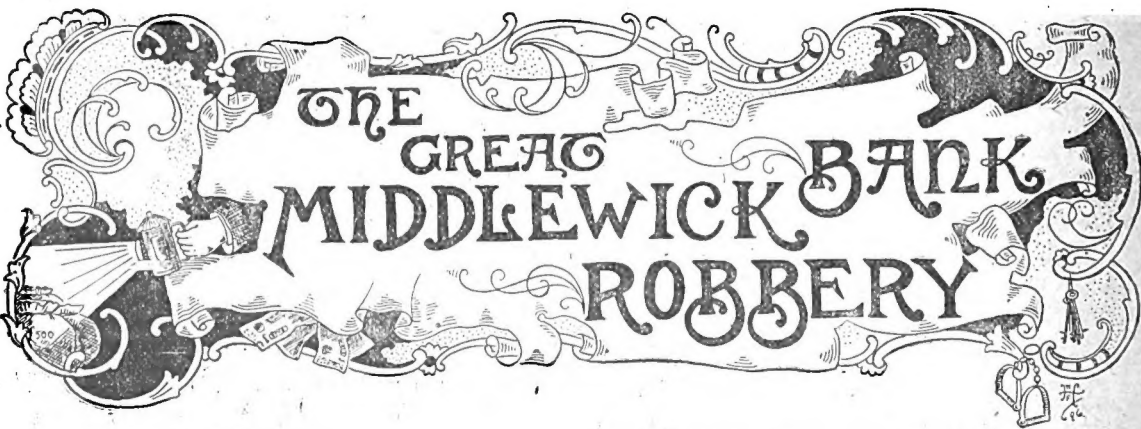
The two white-haired men sat there till midnight, talking about old times and making their plans for the future.

"You must live with me, Tom," said Henry, as he took him home. "I can't trust you out of my sight again."

And Tom gave his promise.

H. P. N.





THE GREAT MIDDLEWICK BANK ROBBERY

CHAPTER I.

TWENTY THOUSAND POUNDS.

WITH an expertness born of long practice, the cashier of the Middlewick Bank counted and shovelled towards the payee of the cheque the gold which looked so much to return for the narrow slip of paper he had received in exchange. Just a minute or two he waited to satisfy himself that everything was correct, and then turned to a gentleman who stood awaiting his leisure.

Instead, however, of stating his business, the caller asked in a low, business-like tone:

"Is the manager of the bank in?"

The stranger was a brisk, bright-eyed man, dressed in a smart business suit, and evidently his visit was not altogether unexpected, for the cashier promptly answered:

"Mr. Bryant is in his room. Will you walk in, please.

"Is the manager of the bank in?"



He is disengaged. Mr. Rutherford will show you the way."

"Thank you," said the stranger, quickly following his appointed guide to the door of a room situated at the rear of the modest building.

"Come in," called out the bank manager, his attention still on the papers before him. "Well, Rutherford, what now?"

"A gentleman to see you, sir," and, ushering in the stranger, the young man retired, closing the door quietly behind him.

The two men were evidently unknown

to each other, for there was not the slightest recognition in the look which each gave the other.

"Mr. Bryant, I believe?" remarked the visitor.

"Yes, sir."

The caller handed a card to the manager who, after studying it a moment, laid it down and extended his hand.

"Ah, Mr. Taylor, I was expecting someone from your place. Glad to see you; take a seat, won't you? Here, this one near my desk."

The cordial invitation was fully accepted, the two men quickly placing themselves so that there was not the slightest chance of their conversation being overheard.

Mr. Bryant again glanced at the card, on which was printed:

ALFRED TAYLOR

NATIONAL DETECTIVE AGENCY,

PHILLIP CAIRNS, *Manager.*

"Of course you have come in answer to my note to Mr. Cairns," queried the banker.

"Yes, sir. You sent it by express delivery midday yesterday; it reached our office last night, and so I was able to be here before eleven this morning."

Perhaps it was a slight oversight on Mr. Taylor's part which led Mr. Bryant to believe that he had only that morning reached Middlewick. As a matter of fact he had spent a busy time in the little country town the night before, but the manager was evidently satisfied with the answer.

"Your firm has the reputation of being both prompt, and, I think I may say, successful in these matters."

"Thank you. We have generally given satisfaction, and I hope we shall do so in this case. Your letter did not give the particulars, Mr. Bryant, of the loss your bank has suffered."

"No. I only referred in a general way to the robbery; it didn't strike me it was worth while going into particulars in the letter, as there would be much which of necessity would have to be told over again."

"Quite right."

Mr. Bryant had wheeled his cushioned chair round so as to face his visitor, and as he talked freely, but confidentially, his fingers smoothed the cord to which his eyeglass was attached.

The man who employs a detective to do a delicate job for him must act like a patient with a doctor—keep nothing back—and seemingly the banker had not the slightest intention of attempting to do so. The occurrence which had brought the detective to Middlewick was the most startling in the whole history of the institution, and since, for obvious reasons, the story of the robbery had been carefully hushed up, the banker was only too glad to find someone in whom he might confide without fear of the news spreading.

Mr. Taylor's usual custom was to ask questions instead of allowing a patron to tell a voluminous and rambling story. By this means he learnt what he wanted to know, and no more. He separated the wheat from the chaff, finding grains which otherwise would have remained hidden.

"What is the extent of the bank's loss, Mr. Bryant?"

"Twenty thousand pounds."

"Is that the exact sum?"

"To a penny. The notes were done up in twenty packages, each containing a thousand pounds. Those alone were taken."

"But of course a considerable amount was left?"

"Yes, or our doors would not be open to-day. While it will cause us much loss, it cannot affect the solvency of the bank itself."

"When was the money taken?"

"The night before last."

"How was it done?"

"That, I hope you will be able to find out for us; it means a good fee for your agency," replied Mr. Bryant, with a smile, and still stroking his eyeglass cord.

"Excuse me expressing myself awkwardly. To be more direct. You tell me that the bank vault has the combination lock, the kind, I presume, which, although it is now rapidly going out of favour, was so popular a few years ago."

"Yes; it is secured by a combination of three letters. For some time past we have been thinking of employing a more modern apparatus, but unfortunately we have done nothing but think."

"How many possess the combination?"

"It looks as if hitherto unsuspected parties have it, for the vault was not injured in the least. Whoever opened it did so by using the combination regularly employed."

"How many were supposed to have it?"

"Only Herbert Stewart, the cashier, and myself."

"You changed it yesterday?"

"Naturally. The horse being stolen we proceeded to lock the stable door."



His fingers smoothed the cord to which his eyeglasses were attached.

"How many watchmen have you?"

"Only one, an elderly man named John Warren."

"How long has he been in your employ?"

"The last twelve years, or more."

"Have you any suspicion of him?"

"Impossible; he is as honest as the day. I would as soon suspect myself."

"What account does he give of the robbery?"

"He knows nothing about it whatever."

"How's that?"

"He slept through it all."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Herbert and I questioned him closely; we could not help believing that he only told the truth when he declared he knew nothing at all about it. It is quite out of his power to counterfeit the consternation he showed."

"But how came he to fall asleep on that night?"

"Because, as he confessed, it has been his custom for years. He is stiff and rheumatic, and in his fright he owned that there hasn't been a night for a long time that he hasn't stretched himself on the settee in the waiting-room and slept till daylight. He kept up his invariable practice, because he knew of no reason for changing it."

"Well, then, how about the cashier?"

"I cannot suspect him. He is a married man, with two children, and one of the members of our local board."

"I wish, Mr. Bryant, that that could be accepted as a proof of his integrity. I will say, however, that I like his looks."

"When did you see him?"

"A few minutes ago. It was he who answered my inquiry as to whether or not you were here."

"He is above suspicion, I tell you," repeated the manager decisively. "It is impossible to suspect him."

"Very well, let him go, then," said the detective, whose "letting go" of the individuals named must be taken in a figurative sense. He had no intention of casting them out of his calculations until he had found out all about them for himself. "The only other employé that I observed behind the counter was the young man whom Mr. Stewart appointed to show me the way here."

"Oh, Rutherford. He is book-keeper here, and the only other employé, except on special occasions when we call in help, or an accountant; but we have not done that for the last fortnight or three weeks."

"Mr. Rutherford struck me as a bright young man."

"He is; and a thoroughly nice fellow apart from business. I always feel glad he gets on so well, as he is the sole support of his widowed mother."

"How long has he been with you?"

"About three years. Surely you don't suspect him! He has never been intrusted with the combination."

"Not openly; but having seen the vault or safe opened, and closed every six days out of seven may have given him the chance of finding it out unnoticed in that time."

Plainly this suggestion startled the banker. He had not thought of it before.

"It may be possible; but I sincerely hope not."

"So do I, for Mr. Rutherford's sake at least. Do you know whether he has any bad habits?"

"No—"

The intonation of the negative showed that the banker had interrupted himself, apparently for no cause.

"Excuse me, you were about to say—"

"Only that Rutherford is a frequent visitor at my house, and all but engaged to my niece. That shows how much I think of him."

"And Mrs. Bryant of course thinks with you on this point?"

"There is no Mrs. Bryant—that is, so far as I am concerned. I am a widower without any children, but my niece, Miss Denton, is dearer to me than all the world."



"Can—it—be—possible?"

"Naturally enough," responded Mr. Taylor, with an inclination of his head and an instinctive feeling that some interesting complications were dimly opening out before him. "Then he, too, is out of the question."

But even as he thus seemingly established Mr. Rutherford's integrity the detective resolved that he would undertake several investigations of which no hint should be given to the banker.

To his surprise, however, Mr. Bryant did not seem disposed to give up the startling idea that had been suggested. He continued to smooth his eyeglass cord, and with his eyes fixed on the floor, murmured, as though communing with himself:

"Can—it—be—possible?"

Mr. Taylor's keen eyes rested on the handsome, pale face. He was studying it intently.

"Do you think," said the banker abruptly, looking up, "that it could have been Mr. Rutherford?"

"At this stage of the inquiry I do not accuse anyone; it is too soon for that."

"But your suggestion that he may have got the combination from the cashier or me—why, it opens a world of possibility. Heavens! what will May think when she learns it?"

The visitor did not express the thought that came to him, that probably she already knew it, for what sins will a woman not forgive the man she loves?

"This burglary is known to the directors, Mr. Bryant?"

"Yes; we had a board meeting yesterday afternoon, when I laid the matter before them."

"What was done?"

"Several things were suggested, but nothing practical, unless you consider the offer of a large reward on the restoration of the money and no question asked, comes under the heading. However, the majority of us thought, and I agreed, that that was too much like compounding a felony. Finally, it was decided that I should be authorised to employ the best detective that could be engaged."

"Excuse me, but your letter to our agency was written previous to that decision, I fancy."

"It was; I told the directors that I was so sure what their final decision would be that I had written you in the morning, as the sooner the matter was put in hand the better."

"How did that strike them?"

"At first they were inclined to withdraw their authorisation, but concluded to let it stand."

"You and Mr. Herbert are the only ones who know the old combination—or, at least, were believed to be. Who generally opened and locked the door of the vault?"

"The cashier. Except on special occasions, I rarely reach the bank before eleven, although, as a rule, I am here till after business hours, in which case I usually close the vault myself."

"You have never noticed anything peculiar in your book-keeper's manner?"

The reply seemed prompt, but the detective observed an almost imperceptible hesitation on the part of the banker.

"I do not recall anything of the kind."

"And the directors have agreed to keep the robbery a strict secret?"

"Yes, not only for the sake of keeping the public faith in us unshaken, but also that the thieves might the more easily be traced. Our employés have been cautioned also, even to the watchmen, and I think no one has broken his promise."

"Has no reference to the matter been made by any of your clients?"

"Not so far as I know. Wait, I had forgotten. Half-an-hour before you came in—I was speaking to Mr. Herbert—someone asked me if I had heard anything, and, when I shook my head, said it was too bad."

"Who was he?"

"Well, truth to tell, I was so deep in the business that occupied me at the moment, that the question did not strike me as odd till after he had gone."

"It's a small matter, anyway," was the off-hand remark of the detective. "It is possible that he referred to something else. Anyway, it would be strange if some rumour did not get about considering who know the facts. Who is your new watchman?"

The abruptness of the question seemingly disturbed the manager, who replied with a faint smile:

"I fear you will think I have done a foolish thing. He is a man whom I never saw or heard of before yesterday, and an entire stranger to Middlewick. Yet I engaged him, and allowed him to commence his duties last night."

The detective indulged in a low whistle.

"That sounds odd, but what is your explanation?"

The subtle compliment was not lost on Mr. Bryant. He began to feel that he could like this man who on so short an acquaintance realised that however strange his action might seem, he had a reasonable explanation for it. More at ease, therefore, he continued:

"I was so disgusted at the result of employing home talent that I could think of no one in Middlewick to whom I would intrust the post. I telegraphed to my friend Cartwright, the manager of Trentern Bank, to send me a reliable watchman. By return wire, he told me that not only did he know of such a man but that he would reach Middlewick by the six o'clock train, and sure enough he did, bringing with him a letter from Mr. Cartwright."

"May I ask what the letter contained?"

"The highest recommendations possible. He said that the bearer, Jack Burton, had been their watchman for five years, during which time he had proved his courage more than once. Also that no bribe could tempt him to betray his trust, and that I might consider myself fortunate in securing his services. There was no discounting such a recommendation as that, and, after consulting with Mr. Stewart, the cashier, I engaged him, and, as I told you, allowed him to commence his duties at once."

"It seems to me," said the detective, "that if this—what did you say his name is?"

"Burton—Jack Burton."

"If this watchman, Jack Burton, is such a prize for you, he would be equally valuable at Trentern Bank, and I don't see why Mr. Cartwright was so willing to part with him."

"Naturally that thought occurred to me, and Mr. Cartwright did not forget to give a reasonable explanation. It seems that Burton's wife, to whom he was strongly

attached, died last week, and that he asked Cartwright if he knew of anyone who would take him on for a time, as he would like to leave the town for a few months, if they would allow him, as he could not stand his old home and surroundings. This he thought would pull him together; but another situation was an absolute necessity, as he was too poor to live without earning anything. He resigned several days ago, and Cartwright said he would be only too pleased for him to come to me."

Without commenting on the story, the detective said:

"And Mr. Taylor's letter? Will you be kind enough to let me see it, if it is within your reach?"

Mr. Bryant selected the letter from among several lying in a clip on his desk, and handed it to his visitor, who scrutinised it closely for a few moments. Then he passed it back, without reading the contents.

"I only wanted to see the handwriting," he explained.

"Are you satisfied?"

"There can be no question as to that letter having been written by Alan Cartwright. Our firm keeps an account at Trentern Bank, and his handwriting is almost as familiar to me as my own."

"Then you think I have done quite right in employing Burton?"

"Quite. Mr. Cartwright is a man whose word carries weight, and you would have been most remiss had you passed his offer of Burton's services over. He is sure to have an easy time of it for a bit, for it is seldom two burglaries are attempted upon one place one after the other."

Mr. Bryant rose from his seat, as if nothing more could possibly be said upon the subject, but, at an inquiring glance from the detective, sat down again.

"One moment, Mr. Bryant; you said a few minutes ago that you occasionally called in an accountant to help your regular bookkeeper. About how often in the year does this take place?"

"Every three months, when we have our quarterly statements to make out."

"And do you always employ the same assistant?"

"Yes, it is only within the last two years we have needed such help, and on each occasion the same person has assisted."



*His visitor
scrutinised it
closely for a few
moments.*

"How long ago, did you tell me it was, since last these statements were rendered?"

The manager reflected for a moment.

"Between two and three weeks."

"Will you give me this assistant's name, and whatever is worth knowing about the gentleman?"

"I cannot do that," replied the banker, with an odd smile.

"You cannot? I do not understand you."

"The party about whom you inquire is not a regular bookkeeper, but calls here when needed, and whatever services are rendered are gratuitous."

"But his name—what is *that*?" demanded the detective with a touch of impatience. "I must know his name."

"It is not a *he*," said Mr. Bryant. "Our assistant bookkeeper is a woman."

CHAPTER II.

WHY THIS SIGNALLING?

It was not often that Mr. Taylor showed surprise, but he did in this instance.

The possibility of the bookkeeper's assistant being a woman had not occurred to him until the declaration came from Mr. Bryant. True, in town lady clerks and bookkeepers had long ceased to be a rarity, but that they should have penetrated to this little country town, and, most wonderful of all, into a bank, was a surprise indeed. And what could her object be in thus giving her services gratis?

But the banker had no wish to mystify matters. His temporary levity had passed, leaving him once more the grave business man who had first greeted his visitor. With a gravity befitting the occasion, he said:

"The assistant is Miss Denton, my niece. She charges nothing for her help, because she does the work from choice, being fond of that sort of thing and having plenty of spare time on hand. She is a skilful accountant, and her services are valuable."

"I do not doubt that, or you would not avail yourself of them."

"She is always pleased when the time comes round for her to take her place at the desk. When I spoke of paying her for her work she was quite offended. She told me, however, that she wouldn't object to a present from me," added the banker, with a smile, "and of course she always receives one."

While this aimless conversation was going on, Mr. Taylor was putting two and two together.

A superficial survey of matters directed suspicion towards young Rutherford. He might prove innocent, but, at this stage of proceedings, things certainly looked black against him, and the detective decided he would bear watching.

According to Mr. Bryant's voluntary information, Mr. Rutherford was something more than a friend to May Denton. She it was who spent a few days every three months in the bank as her admirer's assistant. Some young women are wonderfully keen. Their innocent stare hides an amount of knowledge seldom dreamed of by the opposite sex. Was it not possible that Miss Denton had managed to learn the bank combination from her uncle without his suspecting it, and that, too, without watching his movements? What was easier than for her to do this by a little cunning natural to her sex?

Having gained this important secret, how readily she could pass it over to her lover. But the labyrinth thus opened out before the detective was too speculative. He felt that he might go on for ever and in the end reach nowhere. It is easy enough for a detective to theorise, but all the theorising in the world can accomplish nothing; action is the only practical course.

Most important of all, Mr. Bryant must not be allowed to suspect his thoughts regarding the interesting niece of whom he had spoken. Certainly, if any investigations were

to be made in that direction, it must be without the banker's knowledge.

"Mr. Bryant, I must ask that you will send for the watchman," said Taylor, with hardly a break in their conversation.

The request evidently surprised the manager.

"I think Burton is most probably asleep at this hour, since he was on duty last night, but I will do as you wish."

"I do not mean Mr. Burton, but the other one—the old watchman. I presume he is also asleep," added Taylor with a smile.

"He lives not five minutes' walk from here. I'll send Rutherford round to say I want him."

The visitor had not suspected that it would necessitate the taking of the book-keeper from his work in order to attend to such a slight errand. Middlewick had not yet reached the dignity of town ways.

"My presence may embarrass him," said Taylor; "so while he is here I will keep out of sight. With your permission, that cupboard will serve my purpose," he added, glancing at the place where the manager was accustomed to hang his hat and overcoat.

Without waiting for a reply the detective bounded up and drew back the door. The key was in the lock, but not turned.

"It will do nicely," remarked Taylor, coming back, but not sitting down.

"But what am I to do with Warren when he comes?" asked the astonished banker.

"Question him about the bank burglary; you are greatly interested; you are not sure you have all the particulars; you have thought of something else you want to ask him,



The detective bounded up and drew back the door.

and, therefore, you proceed to question him still more closely than before."

"But," questioned the banker, "I don't catch the meaning of all this. I have already repeated to you all the stupid fellow has told me; why bother with him further?"

"I want to study him, his words, his looks, and his manner while answering your questions. You know, Mr. Bryant, there is a good deal in that sometimes. It might embarrass him, as I have said, for me to join in the examination, or to be present while it is going on."

"Very well. Ah, there he is."

The knock on the door was timid. With one hasty stride Taylor reached the cupboard and drew the door to after him. Then, with hardly any perceptible hesitation, Mr. Bryant called out:

"Come in!"

It was the old watchman, rheumatic, partly bent, and very meek, who slouched into the room, with the air of a man obeying a summons to his own execution.

"Sit down, Warren," said the manager kindly, for despite the impatience he felt with his former employé he could not shut out a feeling of pity when he witnessed his distress.

Mr. Bryant motioned to the chair just vacated by the detective, and the watchman sank into it, in a state of collapse.

Taylor had shifted his position in the cupboard, so that he gained the precise view he wished. He could look straight into the old man's face, while the countenance of the banker was in profile. The blank darkness of the cupboard where the detective was concealed enabled him to do this without a possibility of being seen himself, especially by so unobservant a person as the watchman.

"Warren," said Mr. Bryant, "I have sent for you that I might ask a few questions about the unfortunate affair of the night before last."

"Yes, sir," was the meek response. "I would give the world, Mr. Bryant, if that had never happened; I would indeed, sir. If there's anything—"

"Never mind about that. Regrets are useless now. You admit that it has been your custom to go to sleep, say, about ten o'clock each evening, when you were on duty?"

"I think it—that it was between nine and ten—a little earlier than the time you say."

"It makes no difference; and on the night of the robbery you slept straight through until daylight?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you noticed nothing unusual during all that time?"

"No, sir."

"The outer door was locked, just as you locked it after taking charge of the building?"

"Yes, sir; them folks must have had keys that was oiled, so as not to disturb me."

"Then the first you knew of what had been done was when I sent for you yesterday midday and questioned you?"

"Yes, sir; and if you'd hit me I couldn't have been more surprised."

"Did you sleep more soundly than usual?"

"I must have done. I think the medicine—"

"You admit that you were in the habit of sleeping each night, and it isn't likely there was any difference in the depth of your slumbers. Have you told anyone about the robbery?"

"No one except my wife, and she promised to say nothing. You see, I had to give some reason for my leaving. I thought, at first, I would say it was because I was drunk, but she knows I never drink. Mr. Bryant—sir—do you think they'll—put me in prison?"

"It would serve you right if they did, but as it wouldn't do any good, you will go unpunished providing you keep the matter to yourself. Remember, not only are you to tell no one of the occurrence, but you must not allow anyone to talk to you about the matter."



The old watchman slouched into the room.

Mr. Bryant could think of nothing more to ask the old man, and told him he could go. Repeating his expressions of remorse, and his promise to keep the matter a strict secret, the watchman shuffled through the door, leaning heavily upon his thick stick.

The next instant Alfred Taylor emerged from the cupboard and resumed his seat.

"Well, what do you think of him?" inquired the banker.

"Stupid, but honest; we may as well dismiss him from our calculations. No use in pumping that well."

All the same, however, the sharp-witted detective made the declaration with a mental reservation. Whether it was the manner or words of the old man, or both, cannot be said with certainty, but Taylor had caught something which started his ever-busy thoughts in a new channel. Despite the manager's caution to Warren, and the old man's promise to keep his mouth shut, the detective resolved that he would try his hand at pumping the "dry well."

"No, it's not the least use bothering him," assented Mr. Bryant. "I asked him ten times as many questions yesterday as I did to-day, but the substance of all his replies is that he was asleep when he should have been awake, therefore he knows nothing. The best and only thing he can do is to keep quiet. Come in!"

The brisk knock at the door which had called for the manager's invitation to enter was so promptly obeyed that, even had Taylor wished to return to the cupboard, he could not have done so in time to avoid being seen by the new caller. Accordingly, the detective kept his seat, and looked at the man who, hat in hand, entered with the salutation:

"Good-morning, sir. I beg your pardon," with a glance at the detective, and half turning as though meaning to defer his interview till he could see Mr. Bryant alone.

"That's all right, Burton; come in."

The man seated himself awkwardly on the edge of one of the chairs near the door.

"Mr. Brown," said the banker, addressing Taylor, under the impression that he was doing a very clever thing by thus veiling his identity. "I think I can arrange it about the paper you offer, but, of course, I shall have to consult with my co-directors."

"Thank you," said the detective, rapidly taking the hint, "I trust you will find everything correct. I shall be only too pleased if you can manage the matter for me."

"You will excuse me a moment while I hear what Mr. Burton has to say; he is a new watchman I have engaged."
 "Ah," remarked "Brown," with a smile and slight nod towards the figure near the door; "I am sure you have taken a wise step."

Common gratitude ought to have led the new guardian of the bank to acknowledge this compliment, but he sat mute, as though the sentiment was a little too finely drawn for his full comprehension.

"Well, Burton, what can I do for you?" asked Mr. Bryant kindly.

"I called, please, sir, to ask whether any one else has the key to the outer door."

"Why do you ask that?" inquired the banker, in some surprise. "Have you any cause for suspicion?"

"No, sir; but when you gave me the keys that Warren had been using, I ought to have asked you. I just want to know, so that there can be no mistake about it."

"Mr. Rutherford, the book-keeper, Mr. Stewart, and myself, each have a key to the outer door."

"That's what I thought, sir, but I wanted to be sure. And who else has a key?"

"No one that I'm aware of except—you understand."

There was a world of significance in this remark. It was a clever reference to the parties who had entered not only the building itself, but had penetrated to its vaults. Mr. Bryant acted as though he did not wish "Mr. Brown" to suspect the meaning of his words. He therefore cast a knowing side-glance at "Mr. Brown," and gave the new watchman the benefit of a faint smile. Not to be behind his employer, Jack replied with a big wink of his left eye and a nod of his head; he was not to be caught napping. The face of the detective was as expressionless as the blank wall behind him.

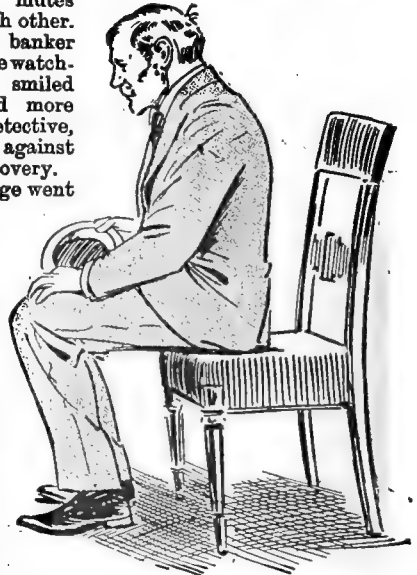
Mr. Bryant turned partly towards his desk to search for some papers. Catching sight of the National Detective Agency's card he slipped it in his vest pocket; he did not wish that any outsider should see that, nor did he mean to disregard the detective's request that his presence in Middlewick should not be known to anyone else.

During the minute that the banker was thus occupied he, naturally, took no note of his visitors.

The detective and the watchman looked straight at each other, and both smiled. Then the former made a slight signal with one of his hands. The other replied at once. It suggested two mutes talking with each other. The back of the banker being towards the watchman, the latter smiled and gesticulated more freely than the detective, for he was secure against any possible discovery.

The interchange went on with great rapidity for a few seconds. Despite the blank stare which these two men gave each other when first they met in the directors' room, it was evident they were not strangers to each other. Indeed, from their mute intercourse it would almost seem that they were fairly intimate, and had, in fact, pre-arranged this meeting.

Suddenly Mr. Bryant turned again from his desk. As he did so the watchman rose to his feet, and after respectfully inquiring whether the manager had any further instructions for him, wished him good-morning, and once more left the manager and detective together.



The man seated himself awkwardly on the edge of one of the chairs.

(To be continued.)

♦ A * TEN-POUND * PRIZE. ♦

(See Next Page.)

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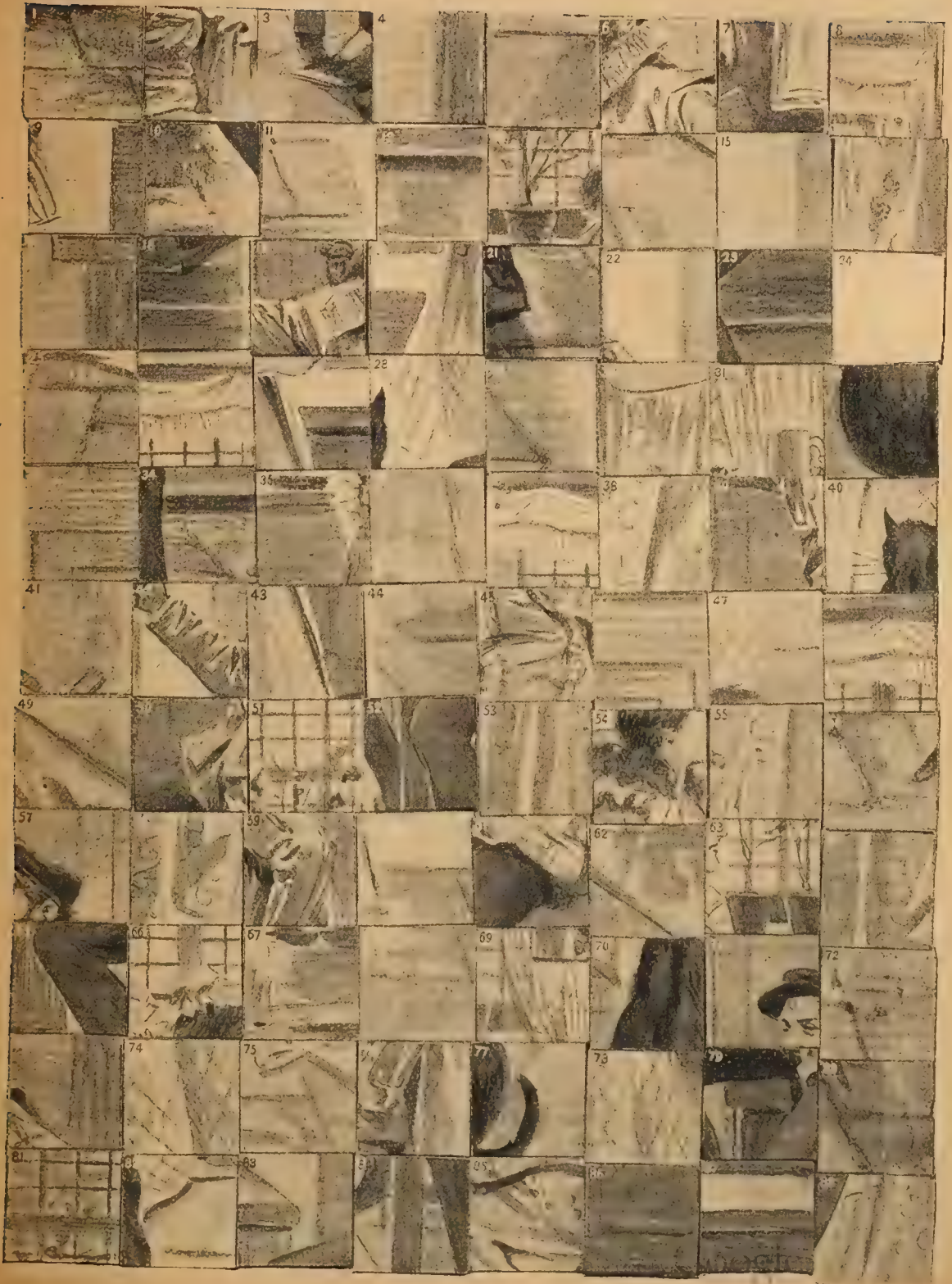
On the next page is a puzzle picture composed of 88 squares. If these squares be rearranged in a certain order they will form a real picture.

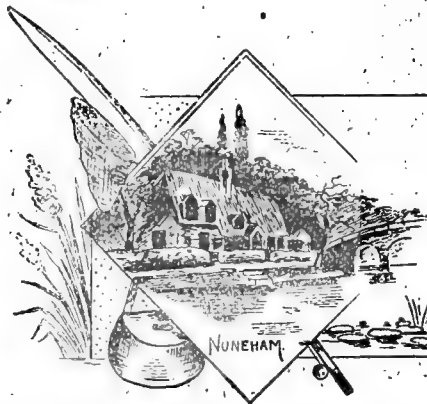
We offer a prize of £10 to the first person who sends the correct solution. In order to give readers in all parts of the United Kingdom as equal a chance as possible, none of the solutions received will be opened until Thursday, March 12th, when all those received will be considered together. In the very unlikely chance of two or more correct solutions being included in one day's post, the prize will be given to the sender of the *neatest* one. Consolation Prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the Editor.

If no correct solution be received on or before Tuesday, March 17th, 1896, the Ten-Pound Prize will be given to the sender of the solution then to hand which is most nearly correct.

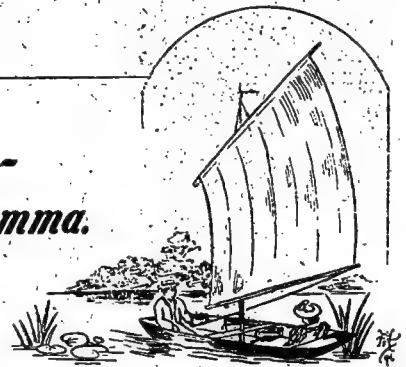
Pictures should be packed flat or folded, not rolled, and the outside wrapper must be marked "April."

N.B.—To make the puzzle more difficult some of the squares have been turned upside down, and one of them has been left out altogether.





- The - Prince's Dilemma.



THERE once came to the palace of a semi-barbaric king a deputation of five strangers from a far country. They were men of venerable and dignified aspect and demeanour, and were received by a high officer of the court, to whom they made known their errand.

"Most noble officer," said the speaker of the deputation, "it so happened that one of our countrymen was present here, in your capital, on that momentous occasion when a young man, who had dared to aspire to the hand of your King's daughter, had been placed in the arena, in the midst of the assembled multitude, and ordered to open one of two doors, not knowing whether a ferocious tiger would spring out upon him, or a beauteous lady would advance, ready to become his bride. Our fellow citizen who was then present was a man of super-sensitive feelings, and at the moment when the youth was about to open the door he was so fearful lest he should behold a horrible spectacle that his nerves failed him, and he fled precipitately from the arena, and, mounting his camel, rode homewards as fast as he could go.

"We were all very much interested in the story which our countryman told us, and we were extremely sorry that he did not wait to see the end of the affair. We hoped, however, that in a few weeks some traveller from your city would come among us, and bring us further news, but up to the day when we left our country no such traveller had arrived. At last it was determined that the only thing to be done was to send a deputation to this country, and to ask the question: 'Which came out of the open door, the lady or the tiger?'"

When the high officer had heard the mission of this most worthy deputation he led the five strangers into an inner room, where they were seated upon soft cushions, and where he ordered coffee, pipes, sherbet, and other semi-barbaric refreshments to be served to them.

Then, taking his seat before them, he thus addressed the visitors:

"Most noble strangers, before answering the question you have come so far to ask, I will relate to you an incident which occurred not very long after that to which you have referred:

"Not very long ago there arrived here from a distant land a prince of distinguished appearance and undoubted rank. To such a one, of course, a royal audience was granted, and our King met him very graciously, and begged him to make known the object

of his visit. Thereupon the Prince informed His Royal Highness that, having heard of the superior beauty of the ladies of his Court, he had come to ask permission to make one of them his wife.

"When our King heard this bold announcement his face reddened, he turned uneasily on his throne, and we were all afraid lest some quick words of furious condemnation should leap from out his quivering lips. But by a mighty effort he controlled himself, and, after a moment's silence, he turned to the Prince, and said: 'Your request is granted: To-morrow at noon you shall wed one of the fairest damsels of our Court.' Then, turning to his officers, he said: 'Give orders that everything be prepared for a wedding in this palace at high noon to-morrow. Convey to this royal Prince to suitable apartments. Send to him tailors, bootmakers, hatters, jewellers, armourers men of every craft, whose services he may need. Whatever he asks, provide; and let all be ready for the ceremony to-morrow.'

"But your Majesty," exclaimed the Prince, 'before we make these preparations I would like—'

"Say no more!" roared the King. 'My royal orders have been given, and nothing more is needed to be said. You asked a boon; I granted it; and I will hear no more on the subject. Farewell, my Prince, until to-morrow noon!'

"At this the King arose, and left the audience chamber, while the Prince was hurried away to the apartments selected for him.

"And here came to him tailors, hatters, jewellers, and everyone who was needed to fit him out in grand attire for the wedding. But the mind of the Prince was much troubled and perplexed.

"His Majesty's notions seem to be very peculiar," said the Prince, 'and, so far as I can see, they do not at all agree with mine.'

"At that moment an attendant, whom the Prince had not noticed before, came and stood beside him. This was a broad-shouldered man of cheery aspect, bearing an enormous scimitar, the upturned edge of which was keen and bright as any razor. Holding this formidable weapon as tenderly as if it had been a sleeping infant, this man drew closer to the Prince and bowed.

"Who are you?" exclaimed his Highness, starting back at the sight of the frightful weapon.

"I," said the other, with a courteous smile, 'am the Discourager of Hesitancy. When our King makes known his wishes to anyone, a subject or visitor, whose

disposition in some little points may be supposed not to wholly coincide with that of His Majesty, I am appointed to attend him closely, that should he think of pausing in the path of obedience to the Royal will he may look at me and proceed.'

"The Prince looked at him, and proceeded to be measured for a coat.

"The tailors and shoemakers and hatters worked all night; and the next morning, when everything was ready, and the hour of noon was drawing nigh, the Prince again anxiously inquired of his attendants when he might expect to be introduced to the ladies.

"The King will attend to that,' they said. 'We know nothing of the matter.'

"Now came officers to conduct him to the grand hall of the palace, in which the ceremony was to be performed. Here the Prince found the King seated upon the throne, with his nobles, his courtiers, and his officers standing about him in magnificent array. The Prince was led in front of the King, and said:

"Your Majesty, before I proceed further——"

"At that moment an attendant, who had approached with a long scarf of delicate silk, wound it about the lower part of the Prince's face so quickly and adroitly that he was obliged to cease speaking. Then, with wonderful dexterity, the rest of the scarf was wound round the Prince's head, so that he was completely blindfolded. Thereupon the attendant quickly made openings in the scarf over the mouth and ears, so that the Prince might breathe and hear, and fastening the ends of the scarf securely he retired.

"The first impulse of the Prince was to snatch the silken folds from his head and face, but as he raised his hands to do so, he heard the voice of the Discourager of Hesitancy, who gently whispered: 'I am here, Your Highness.' And, with a shudder, the arms of the Prince fell down by his side.

"Now before him he heard the voice of a priest, who had begun the marriage service in use in that semi-barbaric country. At his side he could hear a delicate rustle, which seemed to proceed from fabrics of soft silk. Gently putting forth his hand he felt folds of such silk close beside him. Then came the voice of the priest requesting him to take the hand of the lady by his side, and reaching forth his right hand the Prince received within it another hand, so small, so soft, so delicately fashioned, and so delightful to the touch, that a thrill went through his being. Then, as was the custom of the country, the priest first asked the lady: 'Would she have this man to be her husband?' to which the answer came, in the sweetest voice he ever heard: 'I will.'

"Then ran raptures rampant through the Prince's blood. The touch, the tone, enchanted him. All the ladies of the Court were beautiful; the Discourager was behind him, and through his parted scarf he boldly answered: 'Yes, I will,' whereupon the priest pronounced them man and wife.

"Now the Prince heard a little bustle about him; the long scarf was rapidly unrolled from his head, and he turned with a start to gaze upon his bride. To his utter amazement there was no one there. He stood alone. Unable on the instant to ask a question or say a word, he gazed blankly about him.

"Then the King rose from his throne and came down and took him by the hand.

"Where is my wife?' gasped the Prince.

"She is here,' said the King, leading him to a deserted doorway at the side of the hall.

"The curtains were drawn aside, and the Prince,

entering, found himself in a long apartment, near the opposite wall of which stood a line of forty ladies, all dressed in rich attire, and each one apparently more beautiful than the rest.

"Waving his hand towards the line, the King said to the Prince: 'There is your bride! Approach and lead her forth! But remember this, that if you attempt to take away one of the unmarried damsels of our Court your execution shall be instantaneous. Now, delay no longer. Step up and take your bride.'

"The Prince, as in a dream, walked slowly along the line of ladies, and then walked slowly back again. Nothing could he see about any one of them to indicate that she was more of a bride than the others. Their dresses were all similar; they all blushed; they all looked up, and then looked down. They all had charming little hands. Not one spoke a word. Not one lifted a finger to make a sign. It was evident that the orders given them had been very strict.

"Why this delay?' roared the King. 'If I had been married this day to one so fair as the lady who wedded you I should not wait one second to claim her.'

"The bewildered Prince walked again up and down the line. And this time there was a slight change in the countenance of two of the ladies. One of them among the fairest gently smiled as he passed her. Another, just as beautiful, slightly frowned.

"Now,' said the Prince to himself, 'I am sure that it is one of those two ladies whom I have married. But which? One smiled; and would not any woman smile when she saw, in such a case, her husband coming towards her? But, then, were she not his bride, would she not smile with satisfaction to think he had not selected her, and that she had not led him to an untimely doom? But, then, on the other hand, would not any woman frown when she saw her husband come towards her and fail to claim her? Would she not knit her lovely brows? And would she not inwardly say: 'It is I; don't you know it? Don't you feel it? Come!' But if this woman had not been married, would she not frown when she saw the man looking at her? Would she not say to herself: 'Don't stop at me! It is the next but one. It is two ladies above. Go on!' And then again, the one who married me did not see my face. Would she not smile if she thought me comely? While if I wedded the one who frowned, could she restrain her disapprobation if she did not like me? Smiles invite the approach of true love. A frown is a reproach to a tardy advance. A smile——'

"Now, hear me!' loudly cried the King. 'In ten seconds, if you do not take the lady given you, she who has been made your bride shall be your widow.'

"And as the last word was uttered the Discourager of Hesitancy stepped close behind the Prince and whispered: 'I am here.'

"Now the Prince could not hesitate an instant, and he took one of the ladies by the hand.

"Loud rang the bells, loud cheered the people and the King came forward to congratulate the Prince. He had taken his lawful bride.

"Now, then," said the high officer to the deputation of five strangers from a far country, "when you can decide among yourselves which lady the Prince chose, the one who smiled or the one who frowned, then will I tell you which came out of the open door, the lady or the tiger."

At the latest accounts the five strangers had not yet decided.

PERCY SMITH.



The Widow of the Late Smith.

HERE were five of us in the coach—a huge, solid affair, resembling an immense box. It rested on enormous leather straps that allowed it to swing with a motion that is best described by saying it was diagonal, though in fact it was not diagonal at all. One moment we found ourselves sliding towards the foremost corner on the left, as the wheel on that side dropped heavily into some almost bottomless hole; the next instant we would be flying with pleasant unanimity through the rear window on the right, and again, seeking to force an outlet through the roof or floor. But the resultant of these motions, put together, added, and divided, is most nearly described by the word diagonal, and so, diagonal it is.

All five of the passengers were riding inside, for it was a day in November—cold and cloudy, and a light snow was spasmodically falling, as if really uncertain whether to stop or go on, but, on the whole, rather in favour of going on, it being a characteristic of western habits never to give up anything for any cause whatever, once it is begun. So, while a seat outside just at that time was better than no seat at all, it was by no means so desirable as a seat inside.

The road we were to traverse led through the mountains of Colorado, from the mining camp of Greenwood (though why Greenwood none can say—it was far above timber line) to Leadville. It was fairly good wheeling, as that word is understood in the Rockies, but six stout mules had all they could do to manage the coach. One moment they were groaning and straining up some steep incline; the next fairly lifted from their feet as we dashed furiously down a hill, our speed only partially checked by the brake, which Tommy the driver would frantically apply.

An Englishman travelling in the West soon became aware that every one has a title of some sort, no matter whether he has a right to do it or not, and the five men in the coach were known as the Colonel, the Major, the Judge, the Doctor, and the Professor. It is surprising how soon one becomes acquainted with his companions

in such a place. Whether this is due to the community of sensations that govern the passengers as the vehicle lurches to the right or left, or the sociability of the men themselves, I cannot say. The fact remains, however, and in less than half-an-hour after we had started I was on familiar terms with the past history, present occupation, size of pile, and name of each of my fellow-travellers.

On the coach was an express-box, said to contain thirty thousand dollars in bullion, the product of the Greenwood mines. In a rack near the driver's feet hung two Colt's revolvers and a Winchester rifle. The road was considered safe enough, for no robbery had occurred there since the camp had been in existence, still the stage company preferred to make reasonable precautions. Hence the weapons.

After we had exchanged our names and such parts of our personal history as we felt free to give we relapsed into silence. The Westerner, although a sociable, is not a talkative animal. He converses in heats. For a time our quiet was unbroken, save by the groaning and creaking of the coach, the cracking of the driver's whip, and his rapidly-uttered oaths.

Perhaps it is well that justice can never be done—in print—to the profanity of the Western mule-driver. It is as impossible to describe as the singing of some beautiful aria by some sweet-voiced singer! Not that the two can be compared in any way. I merely wished to illustrate the utter inadequacy of words in type to represent the sounds.

It was at the end of one of Tommy's flowery periods (which came to our rescue when the coach, stuck fast at the foot of a veritable hill of difficulty, had at last been dragged up by the mules, inspired by the out-pouring) that the gentleman occupying the middle seat (left) broke the silence. We knew him as Professor Blood, "the hull owner of the Blackeye mine of Greenwood and several others." It was at the close of Tommy's

exhortation, I say, which began softly and slowly, then gradually increased in volume, speed, and power, until the flow was simply overwhelming, that the "Professor" remarked pleasantly:

"Tommy seems to rattle it off to'abey easy, I'm thinkin'. It's a great gift. Wonderful what 'twill do sometimes. When I was a-teamin' it up to Leadville, I would bet willin' I could cuss a dead mule up a six-hundred-foot grade, with a load, and all by the parts o' speech. It's just like anythin' else, though, takes practice.

"Those was great days," he went on a retrospective sigh, "great days. We was gettin' twenty and thirty cents a pound fur stuff, an' makin' slathers o' money; an' losin' it, too," he added, with a laugh. "I 'member comin' down over the divide one night alone, with three-thousan' dollars in my pocket, when a road agent held me up an' cleaned me out. I was pretty mad, but I had to pay cash."

"I'd like to know," said the Doctor, "how one or two men can stop and rob a dozen, all well-armed. It looks as if they had no nerve. I don't think I'd stand it."

The Judge whistled softly at this remark; the Major smiled and made a pretence of wiping the window with his coat-sleeve and looking out; the Colonel expectorated mournfully. The Professor alone was calm.

"Pardner," said he, looking the Doctor in the eye, and tapping him gently on the knee as he spoke, "was you ever held up?"

The Doctor shook his head.

"I thought likely," said the Professor significantly. "Just look here, when you are stopped, cask up quietly and perlitely. It's runnin' too much of a risk to object. If any man is looking for a chance to climb the golden stairs, though barin' of his buzzum for his fellow-creatures—without compensation—let him. It ain't in my line. I'm pretty sure, an' so I say, if ever you're held up, just fork out without any back talk—it's really the cheapest and a long way the safest."

These sentiments seemed to meet with universal approval from the other occupants of the coach, and the Doctor, quite crushed by the weight of opinion against him, relapsed into silence. I was the doctor.

After this conversation became desultory. Now and then a passenger would volunteer a remark, which sometimes elicited a reply and sometimes did not. Often, as the road led up some steep incline, we would get out and walk to restore, by exercise, the circulation in our benumbed limbs. Twice the coach stopped at relay stations, where fresh mules were harnessed in the place of the tired-out animals. The stations were nothing more than rough log stables, with accommodation for the men who fed and cared for the mules.

The snow had been falling all the afternoon in fine flakes, and had spread over the earth a thin white cover that partially hid the roughness of the mountains and whitened the light that came through the clouds into which we sometimes drove. The road was becoming very heavy and the progress slow, when, to our relief, the coach about four o'clock entered a small park of a few hundred acres and pulled up in front of Sampson's, twelve miles from Leadville. While fresh mules were being harnessed we alighted and stepped into a room that served as bar, office, parlour, and reading-room, for Sampson's was a hotel as well as a relay station.

The establishment was owned and managed by Mr. Sampson and his wife, Almiry, or to put it in another way, Sampson's and Sampson himself were controlled by Almiry. A modern Delilah she, who when she

married Sampson, had, speaking figuratively, clipped his locks, and left him deprived of all ambition. There was a rumour current that Sampson drank, a rumour not altogether without foundation, since no one had ever seen him entirely sober. His sole duty was to tend bar, and when not occupied in ministering to the wants of others he was looking after himself.

There was but one beverage sold at Sampson's—whisky—though there hung upon the wall, behind the rough bar, an illuminated card, setting forth, in fly-specked characters, the superior merits of Hall's Jamaica Ginger. But as for the ginger, that was not to be had. Nor were there any indications, beyond dusty lithographs nailed askew to the wooden partitions, that soda water, seltzer, and Munim's Extra Dry were procurable on demand. And so it was fortunate that the systems of those passengers who needed stimulation craved whisky only, for that was positively all that was there.

We had not noticed at first, in the dim light of the room, the figure of a woman, clad in deep mourning and wearing a heavy veil drawn over her face. She sat in a dark corner and seemed to shrink from observation. But when Tommy entered, after looking to his cattle, and had fortified his nerves with four fingers of the "regular thing," swallowed without a murmur, Almiry took him aside and engaged him in earnest conversation, and her gestures then, for the first time, directed our attention to the woman.

Our halt was necessarily short, and we were soon back in the coach; the mules had been changed, and we were ready to start. But Tommy lingered, and when at length he appeared at the door, seemed in no hurry. He stood there, slowly drawing on his gloves and surveying the scene with a carelessly critical eye, and an expression of countenance that seemed to indicate that as for him, if he were to be given the chance, he would make a good deal better world than this one—easy. In his mouth was a cigar, tipped up at such an angle that the glowing end nearly touched the wide brim of his sombrero. The Major, irreverently inspired, voiced the sentiments of the party when he remarked in a drawling tone:

"I reckon that after being the angel Gabriel, for pure glory an' so forth I'd ruther be a driver to a coach than most anythin'."

Just then there appeared in the doorway the lady in black, to whom Thomas gallantly offered his arm, and thus escorted to the coach. As they approached the Colonel gave a little groan.

"We're goin' to have lovely woman along with us," he said plaintively. Consternation was depicted on each face when the coach door was opened, and Tommy, looking in, remarked authoritatively: "Sorry, gentlemen, but I shall have to trouble you. Here's a lady goin' to Leadville, an' she's goin' inside. Jump in marm!" and in the young woman jumped with remarkable lightness, and took the vacant seat in the forward corner.

"Cunnell, you'll look after her," said Tommy at the door; "she's in my charge. Widder of Smith, she is; him as was killed down to the Walker mine last month, but she don't savy a word of English, bein' French. You know'd Smith, didn't ye, Cunnell?"

"Yes, I know'd him well enough, but I never know'd he had a widder. I'll look after her—in English," growled the Colonel, and the door slammed, and the stage rolled off.

As we pulled out the clouds parted for an instant, and a bright ray of sunlight lit up the coach, striking full

upon the dark veil of our new companion. It made briefly visible the outlines of her face, and those of us who were fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of it were convinced that the lady had great beauty. Indeed, the judge, who had a happy facility of expression, acquired from a long, though not lucrative practice at the bar, leant over to the doctor and whispered in tones of fervent admiration:

"She's as pretty as Cle-o-p-e-try, by Jove!" to which the Doctor responded with an assenting nod of much vigour.

Nowhere in the world is a lady more certain of respectful consideration than in the wild West. She's invariably treated with a chivalrous gallantry that is really magnificent; men hasten to do her homage and are proud to be commanded by her. Still, the presence of Mrs. Smith in the coach acted on the party as a little restraint, which the Judge and the Colonel vainly endeavoured to dispel.

"Fond of travellin', ma'am?" said the latter, in his best off-hand style, as he leant towards her and smiled handsomely.

The lady made no reply, and the Judge knocked the Colonel's elbow.

"Sh, Colonel!" he said; "you don't s'pose she understands you, when it's as much as I can do to untangle your ideas from your words. She speaks French!"

The Colonel accepted the rebuke meekly, and made no further conversational effort. The road became more and more difficult as we advanced, and the fresh mules were unruly and drove very hard. Several times in bad places they had balked, and the coach had swung round in a way that would have upset a lighter vehicle, yet no exclamation of alarm escaped from the lady, who sat motionless in her corner.

"Turrible bad place to be held up 'long here," said the Major, after an unusually long silence, during which the coach had slowly pounded over a huge rock and then slid off with an unpleasant scrunch. "I should hate to be stopped here, for I have a little matter of twelve hundred dollars about me which I don't care to lose. Of course, we're all friends here?" he hastily asked.

We were, and then it came out that each man was carrying various sums of money ranging from five hundred to five thousand dollars, the last amount being the property of the Colonel, who described accurately how he had concealed it in a package sewed in his clothing next to his body, where it was quite inaccessible to dishonest persons.

"I reckon it'll take a pretty smart chap to find that," he remarked complacently, as he slapped his hand on the spot where the treasure was concealed. We could not deny this, and murmurs of admiration were heard at his shrewdness. All this time—in fact, since we left Sampson's—the mysterious Mrs. Smith had not moved or changed her position. She still kept her veil down, and in the slowly waning light her black dress seemed to emphasise the shadows in the coach.

"Judge," said the Major at length, "it must be lonesome for her. You're consid'able of a lingoist, couldn't you give her a little touch in the native, just to be perlite?"

The Judge looked embarrassed and scratched his head confusedly.

"Why, mebbe I might rack out some French," he said. "It ain't much to do, but er—what'll I say? You got to be mighty circumspec' in talkin' French to a lady. It's a terrible free langwidge."

Both the military men were impressed by this, the

Colonel particularly so, and for a moment his face was expressive of painful perplexity.

"Well, just say somethin' civil," he said at length. "Ask her if she wants the winder up. 'Tain't likely she does; but you might ask her."

"Oh, no, Colonel," said the Judge, "not that. That particular word winder, in French," here the Judge lowered his voice to a whisper, "is cussin', an' you'll hev to excuse me. That's where I draw the line."

"Well, chin your own way then," said the Colonel testily; "though I reckon I can open a winder fur a lady—in French—without breakin' any of the commandments. Only say somethin' or we'll think you don't know how."

This was touching the Judge on a tender spot, and looking at the Colonel with an air of haughty dignity, he said slowly:

"If it'll amuse the boys, I reckon I'll take a little pasear, though I'm a trifle rusty in my langwidges just now. Had consider'ble practice, too, down in San Migell county."

Then, with a soft abem and a flourish of his handkerchief, he leant forward, and casting a bewitching glance at the lady, murmured:

"*Beunos dias, señora. Habeis vosotros—er—that is—como esta vey!*"

The lady made no answer; in fact, seemed not to hear, but the Judge was in no wise disconcerted.

"Reckon she was thinkin' of the late lamented, and didn't wholly catch on to my idea," he remarked pleasantly. "I'll open another lead," and again he smiled as he murmured:

"These gen'lemen," indicating us with a graceful and comprehensive sweep—"bein' gen'lemen, and well acquainted with good sassiety, hev asked me to pass their compliments to you, ma'am, which I do now. *Er—el tiempo es bein inconstantly, señora, and esta—er—*" The Judge concluded the sentence with a gesture. "It's a little remark in the vernacular of the French," he explained, "an' I reckon it'll fetch her."

It certainly did seem to have some effect, for the lady uttered a sound strangely like a chuckle, but said nothing.

"Judge," said the Colonel, after waiting a reasonable time for an answer, "I'm afraid your langwidges have been—so to speak—tampered with. I've always allowed there was some difference between French and Spanish myself."

The Judge waxed indignant. "A joke's a joke, an' all right," he said; "but I didn't s'pose but there was a man here but knowed the roots of the two langwidges was the same, an' if you can only confine your talkin' to roots—an' you gen'rally can in genteel sassiety—it makes no odds whether it's French or Spanish."

"All right, Judge; all right," said the Colonel soothingly. "Of course, we knowed that well and good, but a man must have his little joke now an' then. But ask her—in your roots—if she's any objection to smoke."

The Judge, partly mollified, did not essay this in speech, but beginning even farther back than "roots," managed to ask the question by signs. The lady nodded her assent with vivacity, and drawing a silver case from her pocket, took therefrom a cigarette, which, after raising her veil a little, she placed between her lips.

At first we were amazed, but the Colonel, with that self-possession which had always distinguished him and made him so popular with the sex, quickly recovered himself and gallantly offered the lady a light, which she

graciously accepted. Then murmurs of admiration were heard. The Major audibly compared her to "a butterfly and a whip-poor-will, by gad," the Colonel swore that "she took him, blamed if she didn't," while the Judge repeated his former opinion, and declared that "she was a reg'lar Cle-o-p-e-try from the word go." The Professor was silent, but I have reasons for believing that he endorsed all the others.

"What I admire in lovely wimmin," said the Colonel, as we sat there quietly smoking, "is the er—ability she possesses to adapt herself to circumstances, as illustrated in the above. We are all friends here, in course, so we can be comfortable; but I'm safe in sayin' I shall be glad to git to Leadville. That little matter of four thousand dollars I got sewn into my—Judge, sure the lady can't understand English—my—in fact, gentlemen, my shirt," said the Colonel frankly, again indicating the exact location of the treasure, "is a tax on my mind, an' I want to get it off."

Outside the snow had ceased falling, and the dusk of the winter's evening was slowly deepening into darkness. High on the slope that rose on our right stood a solitary pine-tree, that had pushed its way through the rocks, and now stood, lonesome and sad, by night and day, keeping a melancholy watch on the valley. The sun, long since hidden to us below, shot a ray as a good-night message, and for an instant the tree was ablaze; then the light died quickly out, and we were in semi-darkness again.

The road wound its way round the face of a high cliff; on one side towered a wall of rock sheer three hundred feet; on the other sank an unsoundable chasm. Tommy sat on the box, his two lamps lit, and his tongue playing a rapid accompaniment to his whip. Inside, the small reflector at the end of the coach only served to make the night without seem darker than ever.

Silently we sat there smoking, the ends of our cigars alternately glowing and dimming in the dingy air. An unusual volley of sound from the box, a cracking of whips, a shouting, and then the stopping of the coach with a lurch startled us out of our quiet. Then a shout from Tom as he spoke to his cattle, and a voice, ringing like a bugle, was heard from the rocks above:

"Come, none o' that! Make a straight haul for it! Throw off that box! Lively, now! Put up your hands an' git down! Every one of you, *git down!*"

Sorrowfully we obeyed. The description the Professor had given a few hours before of our probable sensations was exactly true. A pair of six-shooters held in the hands of a stalwart man, whose face was partly concealed by a black mask, hastened our descent, and in a moment we found ourselves ranged in line, with our hands above our heads, a meek, unhappy, cowed group.

At one end of the line stood Tommy; at the other stood the Colonel, cool, impassive, dignified, confident in the security of his treasure. The last to descend was the widow, but a widow no longer, for out of the coach there sprang an active young fellow, of slender but sinewy build, smooth-shaven, dressed in the conventional garb of the Western rider, and carrying in his hand a nickel-plated six-shooter. And this was Mrs. Smith—who did not speak English. Anyone standing near the Judge at that time, might have heard an exclamation, both forcible and profane. The "widow" heard it, for with a little laugh he (or she) touched his finger to his lips and said:

"Hush, Judge! that's cussin', an' you draw the line there you know."

And then he proceeded to search the pockets of his fellow-travellers as if it were a very commonplace affair, which it certainly was not, and relieve them of their valuables, his associate keeping guard meantime.

Down the line he went, doing his work quickly but carefully, but before he was done the other began to grow impatient.

"Hurry up, Jim!" he said; "ain't you most through? We're late."

"All done but this one," said Jim, the quondam widow, as he halted before the Colonel; "he's got four thousand dollars sewed plum to his shirt. I reckon I'll hev to rip the old coon open to git it." Saying which he drew his knife, and with a quick movement as if to disembowel the Colonel, slipped the point through his clothing, and with a wrench pulled out the package.

"Sorry to trouble you, gents," said the larger man bowing politely, "but I won't detain you much longer, fur I know you want to git to Leadville. I hope this old gen'leman," pointing to the rent in the Colonel's dress, "won't take cold. He must be careful—good men are scarce." The Colonel snorted. "You will kindly stand just where you are till I give the word. There is a few friends of mine a-lookin' at us from the rocks, and I really wouldn't move very much if I was you—I really wouldn't, fur their guns is all hair-triggers, an' dreadful liable to go off. You won't move, now, will you?"

We would not! Wild horses could not have dragged us from that spot, for up in the rocks we fancied we could see two shining barrels, aimed truly at us, and we were really anxious to remain quiet. Before we knew it we were alone; our new acquaintances had vanished in the dusk, and an instant later we heard the same voice, ringing out above us:

"Git into the coach now and git!"

And we got.

ARNOLD WEEVIL.

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THE PREY OF THE WOLVES.



Two men on a tree. A tree stunted, standing solitary in a clearing. A tree with only one branch, and that near the top of the trunk.

Upon that branch the two men—two hunters—are sitting astride, and holding on with the grim desperation of men who know that a relaxing of the fingers, the overbalancing of a limb, a careless jerk, may mean death.

Around the clearing the dark woods bristle blackly on the mantle of white that covers the earth. Above, the morning sun shines coldly in the clear blue sky of France.

The men are both young, of good, broad build and fine stature, and ruddy faces that tell of fresh air and abundant exercise, and though in deadly peril, seem not in hopeless fear. Yet their position is dangerous enough to make the bravest shudder.

For the snow in the woods is pitted all over with rough footprints, going this way and that in apparent confusion, but converging into the clearing nevertheless, and centring round the solitary tree. And for every four feet that have trodden those prints into the snow there is a shaggy body and a cruel head with fierce-fanged jaws and lolling tongue and horrid eyes. Round the tree—some leaping up in vain effort to reach the two men, some sitting and glaring at the prey beyond their reach—snarl and snap and quarrel a pack of hungry wolves.

One of the men—the younger and darker-haired—moves cautiously on the bending branch, and looking at the other with a curious gleam in his brown eyes, says:

"It is a pity, Leon."

"What is a pity—in particular?" asks his companion in danger.

"That we were in such haste that we dropped our guns—and our cigarettes!"

"You are incorrigible, Pierrot! You would jest in the face of death."

"What would you have?" says Pierrot, laughing lightly. "Surely death is gruesome enough in itself to need no added gloom. But, Leon, we need have no fear of these howling brutes, if this branch holds; for are not the gentlemen from the château coming this way at noon?"

"True, Pierrot. But why 'If this branch holds?' It is firm enough."

"Do you think so, Leon? Did you hear that?"

That was a short, sharp crack of the wood near the joining of the branch to the jagged trunk top.

"Yet I think it will bear us till the gentlemen arrive," says Leon, a paleness passing across his face nevertheless. "If it does not——"

"If it does not, Leon?"

"Then one or both of us will have seen the last of France—and of Babette—before many hours."

"You speak more truly than your custom, Leon," says the younger man, with a scarcely perceptible sneer in his tone. "As you say, we shall have seen the last of France—and you might have added, the first of a wolf's internal economy. We shall also have seen the last of Babette. But that will matter little to us, Leon, for she loves neither you nor me."

He pauses as the branch dips lower and the tree creaks and cracks with ominous sound, and shakes a clenched hand vindictively at the snarling brutes below before he goes on.

"If Babette loved either you or me, Leon, it would be the other's duty to slip off this arm of salvation into the jaws of these hungry fiends, if by so doing the chosen one would have a chance to live to gladden her dear heart."

"It would be a duty," acquiesces Leon, his face blanching at the thought, and his shifty eyes avoiding the other's steady gaze.

"Failing that distinction," pursues Pierrot, imper turbably, even with a smile, "we live or die together: for though I have lived a wild life, Leon, and have no hope of woman's love now Babette will not look at me, I prefer my body intact so much that only for her sake would I have it dissected and digested by these ravenous wretches until there is no help for it. And I fear there is little help now—after all. And they are eyeing us very hungrily!"

Leon is silent, as a sudden light leaps into his eyes and a flush reddens his brow, and in his silence the branch bends lower and creaks and cracks again and again and yet again, while the wolves, seemingly gifted with human intelligence, crowd closer and fight with each other for the best places under the breaking bough.

The men look into each other's eyes with mute terror as they cling to that swaying arm, which threatens to come crashing down with every tremour of their limbs. Pierrot is callous to the end.

"To-day's tragedy will be a great relief to Mademoiselle Babette, friend Leon!"

"The branch would hold one of us, Pierrot?" gasps the other.

"It would, Leon?"

"You are sure?"

"I am certain, Leon."

Then there is silence again, save for the dread crack, cracking of the parting trunk top, the downward

swaying of the fatal branch, and the impatiently, expectant sniffing of the lolling-tongued wolves.

Then Leon speaks, averting his glance from his comrade.

"Pierrot!"

"Yes, Leon."

"I spoke to Babette last night on the church steps—you knew that?"

"Yes."

"I asked her to be my wife."

No response; only the piercing gaze of the steady brown eyes.

"And she consented, Pierrot."

There is a note of defiance in the man's voice as he utters the lie.

"Is this true, Leon?"

"I swear it, by St. Marie!" cries the other. "Our wedding-day is fixed for the end of Lent."

The branch bends again, creaking and snapping, until the leaping wolves can almost reach the men's feet. On the trunk itself—now splitting downwards—there is no safety. Pierrot looks at his friend, his rival, with a smile, and asks once more:

"You will swear that this is true, Leon? You will swear it by the Holy Cross of our Blessed Lord?"

"I will swear it, Pierrot, by the Holy Cross of our Blessed Lord! Babette has promised to be my wife," shrieks Leon in a spasm of fear, as the branch sways lower still and the wolves leap howling up with cruelly-snapping jaws.

"It is well, Leon. Do not pain her dear heart more than you can help with this tragedy! The branch will hold now, never fear!"

And he slipped off the tree.

GEORGE C. WALLIS.

My Lady of the Glistening Tresses.

SEATED in front of a long looking-glass in her boudoir was Miss Ethel Kennedy, late one night towards the end of the London season. She was an actress, the principal star of the New Theatre, who had been "discovered" by the energetic manager only a short time since. For the first time in three seasons he was making the theatre pay.

She had scarcely been able to realise yet what an important person she was; the old lady who was attending her at the time, the faithful Martha, did, however. She was engaged in brushing out her young mistress's hair, and she had been doing so for three-quarters of an hour. Night after night she had to comb it, and brush it with the utmost pains; yet it was so beautiful, so luxuriant, so soft and long and silky, that she always forgave it the trouble it caused her. "My hair is my fortune," Miss Kennedy had often quoted to her.

"Do you know," she said presently to Martha, who, as a privileged person received all her confidences, "there's a man who sits in the front row of the stalls who's deeply in love with me. He takes the same seat night after night, and looks at me ever so sweetly."

"And no wonder," answered her maid, "when he sees you coming on in your beautiful white dress, and your hair all shining and a glimmering in the light."

She caressed the silky locks in her hand.

"There are lots of them I expect, too."

"Nonsense," said Miss Kennedy. Nevertheless, she thought this not improbable as she gazed at her image in the glass. For there were other things about her besides her beautiful hair to make men love her.

A humorous thought struck old Martha. "If it wasn't for the play-acting, Missie, you could soon make your fortune."

"How?" inquired Miss Kennedy, but she was thinking of the man in the stalls.

"If you were to show off your hair in a shop window, you'd soon be rich," chuckled Martha.

But Miss Kennedy put an end to flattery and nonsense and prepared for a long night's rest. Nevertheless her thoughts went back to the man in the stalls.

A few nights later Miss Kennedy brought to a successful termination her engagement at the New Theatre. She had made a name for herself, and had already received a handsome offer for the next season.

The following morning she was enjoying the luxury of a late breakfast. She glanced carelessly through her letters until she came to one from a lady friend. This she quickly opened, eagerly devoured the contents. It was from a Mrs. Summers, asking "her darling Ethel" to spend a few days with her.

At three o'clock in the afternoon she was ringing at her friend's door. The polite butler informed her that Mrs. Summers was expecting her in the garden. Would she step out and find her? As she crossed the terrace, and tripped down the broad steps leading to the lawn, she saw her friend running towards her with a smile of expectation on her face. I will spare you the commonplaces and the platitudes of small talk that resulted, and simply mention that presently Mrs. Summers' eyes fell on her son, to whom she beckoned, and who came forward immediately.

As he saw more clearly his mother's latest guest his heart gave a great throb of joy. Before him stood the girl for the sake of whom he had gone night after night to the New Theatre, in order that he might be near her.

After tea and chatter, they sat together in the drawing-room, Miss Kennedy and young Summers.

"Do you know," said the young man, after they had been chatting together for a little while, "I feel as if I had known you all my life."

Miss Kennedy waited a moment before she replied.

"You certainly were a most devoted admirer," she whispered.

Young Summers started. So she had discovered him.

He thought he had never met a more charming companion in his life. He already fancied himself deeply in love with her. "My lady of the glistening tresses," he had long ago named her to himself.

Mrs. Summers was going to take her party that night to a fancy dress ball. Miss Kennedy came down as one of Shakespeare's heroines; she was dressed in a soft white dress and had plaited her beautiful hair, which

fell in long braids down her shoulders, to show it off to the best advantage. If ever a man was in love with a pretty woman's face, it was young Summers that night.

It was an early dance, and the Summers were the first to leave, for Miss Kennedy was tired with her exertions of the last week, and the journey from the town in the morning. It was a short drive home, and by two o'clock there was quiet and a soul moving in Mrs. Summers' house. All was quiet and wrapped in slumber.

Suddenly, as the first ray of the early summer sun was creeping up the sky, a cry rang out from the servants' part of the building, a cry so loud and so full of agony that there was not a person near who did not start up in terror.

In a moment all was bustle and confusion. A fire had broken out; it had caught a light muslin curtain;

it had licked up the paper on the walls, and before the terrified girl in whose room it had originated had time to do more than shriek for help, it was raging fiercely.

The last person to become aware of the danger was young Summers himself. He woke up with a strange unaccountable feeling of terror at his heart; with a choking sensation in his throat. He rushed to the door and saw his mother, pale and trembling, standing before him.

"Thank God you are safe!" she murmured.

"Where's Ethel?" he asked, "is she safe? Tell me quickly."

The terrified woman pointed to the far end of the house towards the west wing. "She's there," she said, "they're trying to get her out. I came for you."

Young Summers stayed to hear no more. He sped along the passage, down a long corridor, at the end of which ran a flight of stairs. It was choked with smoke and flame. He covered his face with his hands and rushed blindly forward. Presently he came out into the garden. A group of men were standing round a window against which a ladder had been placed. The men were hesitating for a moment, each waiting for the other to volunteer the ascent. Young Summers rushed madly into their midst, scattering them on all sides. He sprang on to the ladder, bounded up, and in a moment was at the window. It was securely fastened. With one blow he broke it open. Scrambling through the glass, with lacerated hands and feet he reached the floor. A flame shot up beneath him, lighting up the room. He glanced at the bed—it was empty. He staggered to the door, and stumbled against a white object lying on the ground. Picking it up in his arms,

he once more scrambled through the window, and slid nimbly down the ladder. Willing hands were stretched out to meet him, and to relieve him of his burden.

They carried it along the terrace, Young Summers following behind, until they reached the extreme eastern wing of the building. Hesitating a moment to enter, they looked round to where the fire was burning. Already the flames were subdued. One wing had been entirely destroyed, but they were checked for the moment by the solid masonry of the main building which confronted them. A fire-engine had rattled up, and was now at work; the little stream at the bottom of the garden gave a plentiful supply of water.

Seeing this, the men entered the house, and laid their burden on a couch in a little room close by. Young Summers crept forward, and gazed at the face of the girl to whom he was whispering such

sweet words of love only a short time since. He started back with an exclamation of horror. Surely there was some mistake? This was not Miss Kennedy; this thing that lay before him, with hideous drawn face, white and seared, and shorn of the adorning crown of hair. Could he believe his eyes? He called for someone to bring a lamp, but at that moment a bright gleam of sunlight crept through a chink in the shutters, and shone full on the face of the girl before him. With a low moan of agony, Summers sank senseless on the floor.

* * *

Six days later Summers was closeted with his friend

Johnson. He had told him all the story from beginning to end; how he had first fallen in love with the girl's pretty face when she was acting her famous tragedy at the New Theatre; how he had met her again at his mother's house; how he had spent one delightful afternoon and evening in her company; and then how cruel Fate had stretched out her relentless hands and torn her from him; and, lastly, how he had turned with horror from the mangled thing his eyes had gazed on.

He ended up pitifully enough: "The doctors say she will never look the same again. Her face will bear the scars to the grave. Her beautiful hair will never grow again." He covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud: "My lady of the glistening tresses!"

"But your love," said Johnson, trying to speak firmly, "your love is still as constant—"

The figure before him shuddered as if with ague. "I think," said Summers, "that I must go abroad for a year or two. Perhaps then it will come back to me."

J. MARCWS.



"I feel as if I had known you all my life."

My Adventure with a Tiger.

"WE were travelling along the north branch of the Gadavey River—sometimes upon its banks and again a couple of miles from the water, sometimes travelling five or six miles a day, and again halting for a couple of days to fish or shoot—when a most singular incident befel me individually.

"I had left camp at an early hour in the morning for the purpose of fishing. While I carried my rifle with me, I had no intention of going out of my way to find game. On the previous afternoon I had observed what seemed to be a capital spot in the bend of the river, and it was to this place I hastened as I left camp. Some of the native servants were astir and saw me set out, but I did not want their services. It was pretty thick jungle between the camp and the bend, but at the bend there was a clear spot of an acre in extent with a heavy forest growth and a ledge of rocks for a background.

"As I took a look round before sitting down on the bank to my sport, I remarked that it was a good spot for wild beasts, but as there was nothing moving, I went right to work with my fishing tackle. Catching a frog for bait, I flung in the hook, and it wasn't five minutes before I was meeting with such luck, that all thoughts of tigers, snakes, jackals, and hyenas, were driven out of my mind.

"I had landed half-a-dozen good-sized fish, and was just then playing a larger one, when a slight noise startled me, and I looked round to see such a sight as has seldom come to the eyes of a sportsman. A full-grown tiger was within five feet of me, playing with one of the fish. It was the last one pulled out, and in its dying agonies it was jumping about on the grass. Every time it moved the tiger would reach out a paw in a playful way, and once or twice he struck hard enough to move the fish three or four feet.

"I tell you I was a badly-frightened man, and all I could do was to sit there with mouth and eyes open. The tiger had crept down from the bluffs, and why he hadn't attacked me was a mystery. He went from fish to fish, turning them over with his paw, and time and again brushing me with his tail as he moved about. My rifle was ten feet away, leaning against a bush, and I might have been idiot enough to try and reach it but for a warning.

"My personal servant had followed me to see what luck I had. He came into the neighbourhood while the tiger was playing with the fish, and softly climbing a tree, he uttered the call of a bird to attract my attention, and then sang out: 'Do nothing to provoke the tiger, master. He is a *hiloweele*, and if you do not cross him he will go away.' He meant that the spirit of a good nature had been transformed, and it was clearly the common sense way to follow his advice.

"As the beast gave me no attention I turned to the fish tugging at the end of my line, and landed him. He was of good size and full of vitality, and the tiger waited in a playful way until I removed the hook and threw the fish on the grass. Then he sprang for it as a

kitten would for a ball of yarn, and he played with it in the same way. It was laughable, in spite of the circumstances, to witness his actions.

"He would run round in circles, as you have seen a young dog do, sometimes almost leaping over me, and then again he would become the cat, and creep softly forward to pounce upon one of the fish. Each one as caught was flung to him, and it was a full half-hour before he grew tired of the sport. I expected he would turn to me sooner or later, but the native saw the change of demeanour first, and called: 'Master, the *hiloweele* is going to play with you. Be as'clay in his power.'

"The tiger suddenly left the last fish landed and came stalking over to me, purring like a cat, and acting very playfully. His first move was to worm his head under my left arm, and I'm telling you the solemn truth when I say that I smoothed down his fur as if he had been a favourite dog. I had on a big straw hat, and this he got hold of in his teeth, and played with it for ten minutes, or, until he had torn it all to pieces. I had no more bait to fish with, and sat there waiting for the tiger's next move.

"When he had finished the hat he came over and rubbed his head against me, and purred in a pleased way, and I rubbed him with my hand from nose to tail. I gradually got over my scare, but was yet very anxious to know how the affair would end. The sun was getting well up and very hot, and the beast would soon be seeking his lair. In about thirty minutes from the time he appeared the tiger began to show a change of demeanour. He became nervous and uneasy, and the hair on his back stood up at intervals. I judged that he had got the scent of my servant, and such proved to be the case.

"I dared not rise to my feet, but I made up my mind that if the tiger attacked me I should make a spring off the bank into the river. It was infested with crocodiles, but there was not much choice between being eaten by beast or saurian.

"Once the tiger glared at me and growled, but the next moment whined as if afraid, and edged up towards me as if for protection. The servant had been keeping a watchful eye on my strange playmate, and he now believed the time had come for decisive action. He therefore fired his pistol, and shouted at the top of his voice. The effect was immediate. The beast dropped his tail, uttered a long-drawn whine, and with a sort of farewell glance at me he bolted for the forest and disappeared. I had looked him over pretty well, and had noticed, among other things, that he had a broken claw on the right paw. We did not break camp that day.

"Just before sunset, as we sat in groups smoking our pipes, a tiger charged boldly in among the servants and seized one and attempted to make off. We rallied to prevent, and the beast knocked two other men over before he was dispatched. When we came to examine the body I had not the slightest difficulty in identifying it as that of my playmate of the morning."

H. P. LEGGETT.

* * * The * First * Night. * * *

"I WONDER if there is any truth in an 'evil genius.' Perhaps after all it's merely coincidence, that whenever you meet a certain member of your acquaintance some fatality invariably occurs."

Mrs. Alleyn sipped her wine a trifle nervously.

"You have not eaten a mouthful of lunch," said Lady Susannah. "Have you seen him to-day?"

"Who?" asked Mrs. Alleyn, a trifle sharply.

"Why, the evil genius, of course."

"Oh! no!"

"I suppose it's that man Scourloui?"

"Y—es," speaking hesitatingly.

"A woman would not be interesting enough to come under that category. I expect you are feeling thoroughly excited and highly strung to-day. I ought not to have come."

"Your quiet influence, my dear Susannah, has done me a world of good. You are so optimistic. When you arrived my nerves were simply on wires, but they have gradually calmed. I don't know why I suddenly thought of my evil genius. I've not seen him for more than a year, though everything has been going badly with us. If he appeared to-night," with a little shudder, "I think I should scream!"

"Please don't, for it is not at all unlikely. I suppose a man about town may drop into the theatre, without necessarily bringing ruin in his train."

"Not Scourloui?" muttered Mrs. Alleyn.

"But do you honestly, with or without Scourloui, imagine poor dear Arthur will be a success?" Lady Susannah asked the question abruptly and deliberately.

Mrs. Alleyn opened her questioning grey eyes a trifle wider, and gave a slight gasp of surprise.

"Why, yes. It will be the most terrible thing for us if he has a frost. But I do not see how the play can fail under Arthur's management, and with Arthur in the leading part. Don't you remember how splendid he was in those theatricals Captain Stammers got up at Norton Hall?"

"We certainly had great fun over them."

"Yes, how jolly we were then, before grim poverty laid us low!"

Mrs. Alleyn took up a macaroon and bit it leisurely. "You see, Susannah, we are dreadfully poor—quite at our last ebb. But I still had some money to invest, which Aunt Gertrude left me. Arthur said that nothing is certain now, and to speculate in these troubled times is simply madness. So I decided to take a theatre and let Arthur run a Society play. Of course, it costs a lot, but then *think* of the profits. He has such heaps of friends, and is so well known, that the house is sure to be crowded. I can't tell you what a lot of people have written for tickets on the first night. But it's silly to brag, you wait till this evening, and see for yourself."

Lady Susannah smiled.

"What does his father think of it?"

"Oh! he is simply mad, declares it is lowering the family name, dragging it through the mire. He even had the cruelty to say Arthur was bound to make a fool of himself."

"I can just picture Lord Alleyn holding forth on the subject—what a joke!"

"I don't see that it is the least funny."

"I suppose Arthur is very busy to-day?"

"Oh! yes, I've not seen him since the morning. He promised to be back before six. But if anything prevents him, I shall go to the theatre alone. Mind you are there in good time to support me, Susannah. You know the number of the box?"

"Yes. Try not to fuss, or think too much about it, but lie down and rest till tea. You look as white as a sheet."

"There is no repose for the wicked," laughed Mrs. Alleyn, pushing back the fair curls from her forehead, and fanning herself with a lace pocket-handkerchief. "It is my 'At Home' day, unfortunately."

"You poor thing!" said Lady Susannah sympathetically as they went upstairs. "Forgive me running away directly, but I only popped in to wish you good luck."

"I say—Susannah—do *you* think—it's—low?"

"Not at all. Lady Stobart's daughter is at a tailor's *maison*, parading about in black satin, and taking orders. I would rather have a husband on the stage than a daughter in a shop. It is quite fashionable 'to do something.' If the craze lasts, I shall have to think myself out a profession. Ta-ta!"

An hour later Mrs. Alleyn was doing her best to converse with a dozen or more vivacious females at the same time. She looked prettily pale in her soft green chiffon fichu and elegant silk gown.

They came and went, a succession of gaily-attired butterflies, while a sense of hopeless fatigue crept over Mrs. Alleyn. All her thoughts were with Arthur.

She was just hoping that the last batch of callers had arrived, when the door again opened, and a name fell on her ears that froze her blood and stopped the breath she was about to draw.

"Mr. Scourloui!"

For the moment she dared not turn, but steadied herself with one trembling hand against the mantelpiece. Then, slowly raising her eyes, she stepped forward and felt the magnetic touch of a man's hand.

Scourloui was tall, and dark as the night. His thick black eyebrows made her think of bands of crape. He smiled cynically, and glanced round the room.

Whether Mrs. Alleyn's agitation was visible or not she couldn't tell, but the few remaining visitors simultaneously took their leave. She said good-bye mechanically, and motioned the newcomer to a chair.

It was with an effort that she addressed him in ordinary society tones.

"I have not seen you for over a year, Mr. Scourloui. This is quite a surprise."

"No, I have been abroad, studying science, chiefly in Paris."

"Testing the powers of 'brain versus brain?'"

"Yes. I wanted to see you alone, and I made these people go. It is a useful gift to cultivate."

He showed his white teeth as he spoke.

"It was really very kind of you," replied Mrs. Alleyn lightly, forcing a smile; "they bored me to death."

"Not quite. Let me feel your pulse; you are still alive!"

Mrs. Alleyn drew her hand away sharply.

"Don't!" she said.

His presence affected her strangely, partly from a mild form of superstition, but more especially because he had such a powerful influence over her.

"Is it true," he asked suddenly, "that your husband has taken the —— Theatre, and is going to appear himself to-night?"

"Yes."

"What strange fads you rich people adopt in search of diversion!"

"This is a money, not a pleasure scheme," vouchsafed Mrs. Alleyn.

"And you have every confidence in it?"

As he looked at her, the hopes with which she had buoyed herself up, the confidence inspired by Arthur's assurances that all would go well, and that the piece was "rippin'," faded like the fabric of a dream. She could never act to Scourloui, his eyes made that impossible.

"I—I am frightened," she murmured, clasping her hands. "It means so much to us. We must have money, but I would sooner relinquish that than see Arthur an object of ridicule. Yet what can we say? He courts criticism; it is the penalty of publicity. The suspense is terrible," passing her hands over her brow. "I wish," leaning back against the sofa cushions and sighing deeply, "that I could go to sleep until it is all over."

"There was a princess in an old fairy tale that had only to 'wish,' and her desires were all fulfilled." He was staring her straight in the eyes, watching the nervous twitching of her lips.

"How delightful! If only I were that princess!"

Ten minutes later the bell rang, and as the servant mounted the stairs, Scourloui appeared on the landing. "I know my way," turning back to speak to Mrs. Alleyn. "Good-bye, and good luck for to-night." Then the servant turned and preceded him to the hall.

* * * * *

Mrs. Alleyn sat back behind the box curtain, and surveyed the crowded house through her opera glasses.

Lady Susannah smiled significantly. Something in her face irritated the Hon. Arthur Alleyn's excitable little wife.

A tall, imposing figure entered the stalls and sat quite near the stage box. It was Scourloui.

Susannah pointed to him with her fan.

"Your evil genius," she whispered, "come to use his influence against you."

"I mastered it this afternoon," replied Mrs. Alleyn. "I can defy him now. You will see that even the presence of Scourloui cannot mar my husband's triumph."

She spoke proudly, though the eyes of the man below were riveted upon her firmly. She returned the glance with a low laugh.

Her lips were still smiling as the curtain rose.

She watched the progress of the play in ecstatic delight, following Arthur's every movement entranced.

Rounds of applause greeted him at every turn; not one of his points failed to tell on an enthusiastic and appreciative audience.

After the final scene her cup of happiness was full; her heart swelled as she heard the shouts for her husband: "Alleyn! Alleyn!"

He advanced before the footlights, bowed, smiled, and appeared about to speak. He opened his lips, but no voice came; he struggled to utter, yet only a few incoherent sounds escaped him. It was a moment of direst suffering for his wife. She gazed from her box amazed and horrified, then covered her face with her hands, and sprang to her feet. As she did so a sharp cry broke from her lips, and she awoke.

Mrs. Alleyn sat up on the sofa and stared round the empty drawing-room. She was in exactly the same place as when she had last spoken to Scourloui, but she could not remember falling asleep, nor the fact of his leaving her. The dream still held the uppermost place in her mind. Then gradually the words she had heedlessly spoken returned: "I wish I could sleep until it is all over!"

Was it possible Scourloui had taken them seriously, and put her off into a mesmeric slumber? If so, what was the hour, and where was Arthur? She turned on the electric light, and stared at the clock. *Half-past nine!*

Why, the piece would have begun over an hour ago.

Still dazed and bewildered she pealed the bell.

A trim maid with very wide opened eyes, and astonished brows answered the summons.

"When did Mr. Alleyn come in?" asked his wife anxiously.

"He has not been back at all, ma'am. I came to wake you for dinner, but you were sleeping so soundly I couldn't."

Arthur had been detained then. What would he think of her non-appearance? How could she tell him she had over-slept herself? It was utterly incomprehensible!

"When did Mr. Scourloui leave?" she asked vaguely, feeling more foolish than she had ever done in her life.

"About five o'clock, ma'am. You rang for me to show him out."

"He did that for himself," thought Mrs. Alleyn.

"Will you dine now?"

The question seemed to bring her suddenly to her senses.

"Dine!" She scoffed at the idea.

"Bring me a cloak, and whistle for a hansom at once," she cried. "I must go to the theatre just as I am."

She seized the evening wrap the maid brought her, flung it about her shoulders, rushed down the stairs, and into a passing hansom.

"Drive with all your might to the —— Theatre," she said.

The evening air blew on her forehead, now burning with suspense. To think that Arthur was at that very moment making his first appearance on the London boards, without her being present. How dare Scourloui! Was it, perhaps, that he knew Arthur would fail, and wished to spare her the pain of witnessing his humiliation, and hearing the mocking jeers? Her heart beat faster. How rapidly the horse sped over the wood pavement, yet it seemed slow—slow!

Ah, now they were turning the corner, and the flaring lights of the "house" would meet her fevered vision.

She gazed up the street, but the theatre was shrouded in darkness, yet she saw by the roadside lamps the placards with her husband's name outside.

"P'raps we've come to the wrong theatre," the cabby suggested.

"Can't you read? It is written up in plain English—the date—the name—everything!"

She sprang back into the hansom. "Drive me to the stage door—quick!"

A moment later, and she was out again, only to find that entrance closed also.

She rapped furiously in a frenzy of apprehension.

Eventually it was opened by a man in evening dress.

He seemed to be in a hurry, and was shrugging his body in to a long overcoat.

There was an expression of intense annoyance on his face; his lips were compressed and cigarless, though he carried a smouldering end of a "Bock" between his fingers.

"What has happened?" asked Mrs. Alleyn, catching her breath.

He glanced at her suspiciously, then recognising the manager's wife, took off his hat, and muttered: "Good-evening."

She repeated her question.

"You haven't heard?"

His words were incredulous. Mrs. Alleyn shook her head. She was too overcome to speak.

"It's all up, for to-night at least!" he muttered hopelessly, "yet we are in the dark still."

"Where is my husband?"

"Don't you know?" he cried wonderingly.

Mrs. Alleyn trembled. "Tell me," she said hoarsely.

"About an hour before the doors should have opened, we had a telegram from Mr. Alleyn, saying: 'Close the house, return the public their money, there must be no play to-night.' He has not been near the place yet. We have seen nothing of him!"

Mrs. Alleyn made no sign. She stood as one petrified, till she noticed two or three small urchins gaping at her under the shadow of the wall. The sight of their pinched yet curious faces reminded her that she was hatless in a London side-street, staring into a comparative stranger's eyes.

"When was he last seen?"

"Here, late in the afternoon. Everything was satisfactorily prepared. Green, the call-boy, declares he saw him at Waterloo station about six, with a lady. But he is not very reliable in his statements."

These words were enough for Mrs. Alleyn. She asked no more, but turned away dizzily. She stepped back into the cab, seeing nothing, and drove home through the busy night, utter perplexity, numbness and despair creeping over her shocked senses. She did not know what to think. Ruin, infidelity, all things terrible and disgraceful, presented themselves in turn to her mind.

"Has Mr. Alleyn returned?" she asked, as she staggered, weak and white, into the dimly-lighted hall.

"No, ma'am."

She walked slowly into the dining-room. Their supper was spread, supper for two!

"Bring me the 'Bradshaw,'" she said faintly.

If Arthur did not return before the morning, she would take an early train to Beveree, and ask Lord Alleyn's advice. He was angry with his son she knew, but his heart was in the right place, and he always had a soft spot for Arthur's little wife. He was besides a man of strong common sense and much activity. In an emergency she felt she could rely on Lord Alleyn.

There was a train that left at seven a.m.

All through the long weary hours of darkness Alice Alleyn waited downstairs, listening to every passing footstep, and watching each conveyance that rumbled through the square. But no sign came.

The long drawn out suspense grew more unendurable. She paced the room, or sat in mute agony, with her face pressed against the window. At half-past five she went to her room and changed her silk dress to one of sombre cloth. She found some slight relief in activity, and by seven o'clock was weeping silently in the corner of a first-class carriage, with a ticket to Beveree tucked in her black suede glove. It comforted her to cry, for all night her eyes had been dry and burning, her cheeks tearless.

What would her aristocratic old father-in-law, in his ancient home on Beveree Hill, think of her sudden arrival and melancholy tale?

She tried to picture how he would take it, but her imagination failed to paint a convincing scene. By the time the train stopped at the country station, she had worked herself into a fever of apprehension. No sort of conveyance awaited her, and the morning being bright and sunny, she determined to walk. How ironically the hedge sparrows twittered. With what mockery the early sunbeams glistened through the trees! At last she reached the end of the long avenue and rang the clanging bell.

The door opened simultaneously. She rushed forward with a cry:

"Arthur!"

"You are too late," he said, putting his arms round her gently. Then she noticed his pale face, and haggard sleepless eyes, still laughing aloud with pure joy, and a sudden reaction from bitterest fear.

"Why did you do it? What does it all mean?" she asked, clinging to him like a child.

"Didn't you get the message I sent you?" leading her to a seat in the hall. She sank upon it gladly.

"No!"

"I have been up with our poor father all night. Florence and I came down together. He had a fatal accident, riding, and died about half-an-hour ago."

Alice gazed at him in horror. She could hardly believe the words.

Arthur seemed to be struggling with his emotion. He answered the questioning look in his wife's eyes.

"Oh! yes, dear, we made it up. He was conscious to the last. I swore never to disregard his dying request, and my dream of the drama has vanished. He talked of it last night when I arrived, with a certain grim humour through his pain.

"The bay fiend has smashed me up in time to stop that, eh, my boy?" he gasped feebly. And then, with a choke in his voice, he sent for the will, out of which, in a moment of anger, he cut the 'play actor,' and added a codicil, after receiving my word to renounce the stage."

"Oh! Arthur, why did we ever think of it?" sobbed his wife.

So the Alleyns lived on in independence, and the world was deprived of the privilege of criticising a peer's son.

Among Alice's letters of condolence came one from Scourloudi, in which he trusted she might sleep peacefully through all the evils of life, and only wake to Fortune's smile.

"I am going away" he concluded. "for a long season. *Adieu, et puis bon soir!*"

W. G.

When The Birds Begin To Sing.

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM. Author of "Through the Valley," "Six First-Class Passengers," etc.

SUMMARY.

Philip Roche marries Eleanor Grebby, daughter of a farmer, and they spend their honeymoon on the Continent. On their return to Richmond, Eleanor becomes friendly with a frivolous widow, Mrs. Mounteagle, against her husband's wishes. She is introduced to Carol Quinton, who fascinates her. Her husband is heart-broken, and consults his cousin, Erminie Henderson, who comes to stay with them. Eleanor's parents come to spend a day or two with her, and disgust Mrs. Mounteagle with their homeliness. Nelson Lane and Erminie are engaged. Each is led to think the other rich, but the deceit is mutual. In order to right themselves in one another's eyes, they each, unknown to the other, speculate in mining shares. Eleanor is induced to lunch at the Savoy with Carol Quinton. They there meet Mrs. Mounteagle and her fiancé, Herbert Dallison. Philip appears on the scene, and Eleanor and Herbert change tables. Philip afterwards discovers that the meeting between his wife and Carol was not accidental, and, on the recommendation of Erminie, suggests that Eleanor should return to her parents at Copthorne for a time.

CHAPTER XIII.

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow.—SHAKESPEARE.

ELEANOR is superintending her packing, when Giddy Mounteagle enters her room.

"I called and ran straight up, dear," she says, "knowing you were busy. What! are you only taking so small a trunk into the country?"

"Yes, no finery, only two stuff dresses and a felt hat. I want to forget there is such a thing as society or 'toilettes.' I am going to have a good time with all the farm people, and the school children, and be just as I was before I married. There are some of my clothes still hanging up in my old room, I shall put them on, and grub in the garden, rake, weed, and mow. Our poor machine was dreadfully cranky before I left, I should think it has fallen to pieces by now, but I mean to have a try. Mother's bit of front lawn is the pride of her heart. Black Bess will meet me at the station, and Rover—dear affectionate dog. I shall swing on the gate and whistle, and—"

But Eleanor's prattle breaks off shortly, for her throat feels strangled, and the misery that Giddy clearly sees beneath her smiles, overmasters her.

"I think I have got a cold," she falters; "my eyes water so, and I have a little husk here when I speak."

But Giddy knows it is the coldness of desolation that brings the raindrops to shine on Eleanor's lashes.

"Do put in a few dainty gowns, dearest," she implores. "It would be such fun to show them off and astonish the natives. Say that hat from 'Louise,' in case you tea with the vicar's spouse, of whom I have often heard."

Eleanor is too weary to object, and lets Giddy order Sarah hither and thither till the room is in a litter and her head in a whirl.

"Go and fetch me Mrs. Roche's Roumanian jacket, the one from Liberty," says Giddy to Sarah. "I want to borrow it as a pattern. I am sure that nice little dressmaker at Twickenham could make me one exactly like it," turning to Eleanor, as Sarah quits the room. "You don't mind, dear?"

"Oh, no."

"Did I tell you I met Lady MacDonald yesterday, and she actually asked after you? I was quite surprised. She is in great trouble, poor thing, having lost her favourite maid—a regular right hand in the household. The woman had a very good figure, and has gone to the Empire, and gets £4 a week for standing in the front row of a ballet or chorus or something. Lady MacDonald feels sure she must have been in the trade before she entered her service. She gets that excellent pay because she just matches another girl, like a

horse you know. It must be vastly more entertaining than fastening Lady MacDonald's back hooks. The worst of it is she will tell all the other servants about it, and make them envious. The scullery maid, who is short and broad, and stout, is fired to go, and dreams of nothing else."

"I wonder the beautiful Lady MacDonald has time to trouble about the dreams of a menial," says Eleanor, with the touch of sarcasm that always accompanies any mention of Giddy's friend.

Sarah returns, and the subject drops.

"Is it not a pity Philip is dreadfully busy this week, or he was to have come with me to-day," continues Eleanor. "I doubt now if he will be able to get to Copthorne at all."

"How like a husband to be busy when you want him. I am sure you are much too young and pretty to travel alone."

"Shall we leave Sarah to finish the packing, and come down? I must have an early lunch."

Giddy follows her to the dining-room.

"I saw Carol Quinton yesterday," she says. "I told him you were going away, but was true to my word, and did not divulge the address."

"I wish you had said nothing about my movements," replies Eleanor uneasily, starting at the sound of Carol's name.

"I could not help it, he asked me all about you directly; he never talks of anything else, which seems rather absurd to another woman."

"Yes, you must grow horribly tired of the subject."

"You remember that dance at the 'Star and Garter' that



Eleanor's prattle breaks off shortly.

you didn't go to? Well, I only heard the other day from those 'Bennett-Jones' girls that he asked them if you would be there, and they said 'yes,' just because they wanted him to make their party complete; they took three men and three girls. They knew really that you had a previous engagement, but kept buoying him up all the evening by expecting your momentary appearance. Later on, Addie, the eldest, broke it to him that you had never intended going. He was so offended he went straight home, and has not called on them since. It was rather mean you know to lure him there under false pretences."

"When did they tell you that?"

"Oh! the next day Addie called about ten in the morning, before I was down. She was really quite funny about it. Eleanor bites her lips.

"It seems that my name is coupled with Mr. Quinton's," she mutters.

"Well, people will talk, whatever you do. Little Mrs. Hope saw you walking with him in the park one day, and she told Addie, and Addie told—"

"Oh! don't," cries Eleanor impatiently, putting her hands to her racking head, and stamping her foot impatiently. "I would rather not hear. It is all so petty, so stupid, so mean. What have I or Carol Quinton to do with them?"

"You have flirted with him, my dear, so openly at the Richmond parties, you can scarcely expect to escape observation."

"I hate the people here—I hate everybody!" declares Eleanor passionately. "I shall be thankful to get away. There are no gossiping fools to drive me crazy at Cophorne."

"How delightful! Fancy wandering about with a cow for your chaperon and the birds for critics, a rural pasture for your ballroom, a buttercup meadow for your lounge! How long shall you stay in 'Happy Arcadia'?"

"As long as I can," replies Eleanor. "I should like never to come back, and when I do I will take good care I am not seen with Mr. Quinton. It is all this silly girls' talk that eventually reaches Philip's ears, and makes our home unbearable."

"Yes, Eleanor. The breath of scandal permeates through the stolidest walls, or perhaps it comes in by the keyhole. It is a germ that is spread by chattering tongues, like some deadly disease. It nearly ruined my life when I was young."

"What a pity it cannot be taxed," sighs Eleanor. "By the way, the last thing I heard was that you had broken your engagement with Bertie. Of course I did not believe it."

"Which was distinctly wrong of you under the circumstances. I am disappointed in him. We have decided to go our separate paths—apart."

"Oh! Giddy I am so sorry. But why?"

"When I marry (which I shall do some day again), I want a rising man, clever, pushing, ambitious, like Lord MacDonald, in fact. Someone who will improve my position, lift me, instead of being a burden. Bertie's intellect was very weak, and I do hate a fool!"

"I should have thought that would be rather an advantage in a husband," remarks Eleanor.

"Really Bertie was too expensive, he wanted so much pocket money, I could not afford the luxury of a *fiancé* on his terms. Of course he is broken-hearted, dear boy, and naturally I wept a few poetical tears, and said I should always think of him as a friend."

"Poor Bertie! I am sorry for him," says Eleanor. "I cannot bear to hear of anyone loving in vain, it is such horrible suffering."

She is thinking of herself and Carol Quinton.

"Human hearts are regulated in a very unsatisfactory manner. Are you sure you have had enough lunch?" as Eleanor pushes her untasted food away, and sips her sherry.

"The carriage is at the door," she replies, "they are getting the luggage down."

Eleanor and Giddy go into the hall together.

As Sarah carries the dressing bag out, it flies open, and something falls at Mrs. Mounteagle's feet.

She picks it up.

It is a photograph of Carol Quinton.

"You must have that lock secured," she says laughing, "or buy a strap."

Eleanor colours, and hides the photograph in her muff.

"Good-bye, Giddy."

"Take care of yourself, my sweet," returning Eleanor's caress. "I have no doubt it will be very merry and jolly in the country," with a little grimace that means it won't.

But Mrs. Roche cares not to what corner of the globe she is travelling as the train bears her to Cophorne. She is too utterly miserable to notice places or seasons. She just sits by the window, and stares at the picture she has drawn from her muff, from which the eyes of Carol Quinton look pleadingly in hers.

"I wish I could bury myself," she thinks, her mind turning to Africa—America—Asia—any of the far off worlds she has read of in geography books and fiction. "I wish I were someone else, or even the old Eleanor that Philip stole from Cophorne Farm. Why did he not leave me there? It would have been far better for us both!"

An elderly woman seated opposite glances at Eleanor over her paper, struck by the strange pallor of the young face, the nervous twitching of the mouth, and tear-dimmed eyes.

The stranger leans forward suddenly with an abrupt question.

"May I see that photograph?"

Eleanor starts in trepidation; her thoughts have been so far away that they are brought back to the present with an effort.

She sees before her a face lined more deeply with sorrow than time, a woman who might still have considerable beauty had she not dyed her hair in her youth and ruined her complexion with cosmetics.

The request does not offend Eleanor, for Mrs. Roche is easily won by a kind look or a smile.

She hands the photograph across, watching the stranger's expression.

"What a handsome face!" she exclaims, with a little gasp of admiration.

"Yes," sighs Eleanor.

"I never saw such mesmeric eyes, and yet they are soft, though powerful. I should say that man must have broken many a heart with those eyes."

She looks shrewdly at Mrs. Roche as she speaks.

"If he loves you," she continues, "he will be true."

Eleanor's head droops.

"You love him," said the stranger, reading the tell-tale blush. "Are you going to marry him, my dear?"

"No," falters Eleanor, "I wish I could."

"Ah! I thought so. Forgive me for my curiosity, but your face interested me, and I am not conventional. I always speak if I wish, though it offends some people. To me the fashion of introducing seems absurd. Here we are all jumbled up together in the same little world, yet everyone is a mass of reserve, a mind in armour, they never say what they mean, seldom speak from the heart. One is in the dust, and another on the throne, and they all die in like manner, to be buried most probably by a man they would not have dared address without an introduction, measured by an undertaker they could not have been seen walking with in the street, and to mix with thousands of spirits whose ancestors and pedigree are unknown."

Eleanor listens in surprise.

"Are you uncertain about your future?" the stranger asks.

"A little," falters Eleanor nervously.

"Then let me look at your hand, I may be able to help you. No, the left hand please," as Mrs. Roche tremblingly unbuttons her right glove. "Ah!" as the gold wedding ring is revealed, "I was afraid so. I see it all now, this, (pointing to the photograph), is *not* your husband."



"This is not your husband."

Eleanor tries to speak, but her throat is parched, and dry. She only bends her head and gazes at the lines in her pink palm.

"You are going on a journey very soon," vouchsafes the stranger. "I wish it could be prevented, for it brings more pain than pleasure—misery, desolation."

Eleanor snatches away her hand.

"I don't want to know any more," she says, almost fiercely, pulling on her glove.

"I did not mean to frighten you," replies the woman penitently. "But I want to warn you. Whatever you do wrong in this world, my friend, is always repaid. There may be a heaven and a hell in the hereafter, I know not, I am not in a position to say, but of one thing I am certain, there is the hell here on earth, which measures out the allotted punishment to its victims."

"I don't understand you," exclaims Eleanor. "You talk to me as if I were a criminal."

"No," shaking her head sadly; "only as to a young and beautiful wife, who dreams and cries over another man's picture. You have the fatal, dangerous gift of fascination, Mrs. Roche."

"How did you know my name?"

"It is by me on the label of your bag."

Eleanor is silent. She waits for the stranger to continue.

"In my youth, Mrs. Roche, I was as fair as you—I was unhappily married. I looked lightly on the bonds that meant so much until they fettered me—held me down, as I then imagined. Between me and my husband the sentiment of camaraderie never existed. When I was not coquetting with him I was quarrelling. I tell you this because I shall never see you again. You do not know me—or care. I may be dead to-morrow—you would never hear. We are only just passing in life, and have paused to speak. The man I married was by necessity a preoccupied breadwinner, and during his daily absences in hot pursuit of the staff of life I met—well, we will say this man," taking up the photograph of Carol Quinton.

Eleanor snatches it from her.

"Ah! yes, just what I should have done then. I was hot-headed, and reckless, I had a good life in my hands and I ruined, spoiled, destroyed it! The cruel thongs of public opinion lashed my quivering flesh, the galling retribution broke my spirit, I cried to God, but He hid His face, I was an outcast, lost, I could only lie and moan for death which never came."

The stranger covers her face with her hands, and shudders visibly.

The wedding ring to which she has no right, is still on her wasted finger, hot tears, forced from her eyes through recollection, pour down her drawn cheeks, making little rivulets through some coarse powder of the cheaper kind.

Eleanor's ever-ready pity rises up to crush the anger previously felt, for she sees now the effort that this brief confession has cost her fellow traveller. She knows, too, the reason for which these words were spoken, and horror stops the beating of her heart, it checks her throbbing pulses.

Mrs. Roche leans forward, and takes the stranger's hands.

"Thank you," she murmurs simply.

The woman clasps the little fingers gratefully.

"You understand?" she asks.

Eleanor whispers: "Yes."

"Do you know what I saw in your eyes?"

"No."

"Three long words that kept repeating themselves. All the same words, and the worst, the most heartbreaking. 'To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow!' They will drive a soul to perdition quicker than any in the English language. I am going to have them engraved on my tombstone, because I can only conquer them in death."

"You are right. I was looking on, living in fancy the worthless days and hours."

"Crush that tendency, Mrs. Roche. Think of me when your life seems worthless, and remember all that I have lost. Your face is so sweet, so pure, so beautiful, it was made for the good love that crowns spotless womanhood. But this is my station, and I shall never know what you do with your future."

"Shall I show you?" says Eleanor hastily, for she is easily swayed, and the stranger has worked upon her emotion.

"Yes."

"See!" and the soft, enticing eyes of Carol Quinton are torn asunder—the photograph is reduced to a handful of scraps scattered on the carriage cushion.

"You are a good woman," says the other rising and looking down tenderly, lovingly at Eleanor.

Again they clasp hands, then a cloud of towzled hair under a black crape bonnet vanishes down the platform, and Mrs. Roche is left alone, with the pieces of torn cardboard and the scent of patchouli on the opposite seat.

CHAPTER XIV.

It need, to die—not live.—CHAS. KINGSLEY.

"HAVE I changed, or has everything changed?" Eleanor asks herself, as the days slip by in the old farmhouse.

Mr. and Mrs. Grebby are just the same warm-hearted, genial couple as of yore; they crack the same jokes at their knife-and-fork tea, while Rover wags his tail as pleasantly as ever, and Black Bess trots to market.

The school children have not forgotten "Teacher," and greet her in demonstrative fashion, flinging their small arms round her neck when she stoops to kiss them.

Yet Mrs. Roche finds that their mouths are sticky, and the little hands she clasps in hers hot and unpleasant to the touch.

She rises early, and on churning morning helps her mother even more industriously than in past days, yet her heart is heavy, and the old songs never pass her lips without a stifled sob. She tries to hum the "Miller of Dee," as for the sake of happy recollections she polishes afresh the pewter service on the parlour table, yet all the while her



Flinging their small arms round her neck.

eyes are scrutinising the inartistic arrangement of the room. Why should the horsehair sofa be placed straight against the wall, and those ghastly wax flowers under glass covers adorn the stiff chimney-piece, which might be made so pretty? The memorial cards, that are framed and hung on the wall—how gruesome they appear in the spring sunshine! She longs to pull them down, and burn them, but to do so would be to violate poor Mrs. Grebby's most sacred feelings.

She looks in the old family Bible, standing in its accustomed place on a table by the window. There are the births, deaths, and marriages of the Grebby family for generations. Oh, if her marriage could be blotted out, and a date of death mark her name. She envies the twins that died in their infancy, when she—Eleanor—was only two years old.

The pewter pots tire her arm, unaccustomed now to rubbing anything but diamond trinkets. The service she so admired once does not attract her now. She puts it away half clean, and longs for a novel.

Vegetating was not very soothing after all. The poisoned arrows had followed her even to Copthorne, and their wounds could not heal. The thoughts she struggled to suppress, here in the dead calm, proclaimed themselves more loudly, worked fiercer havoc. She longs, pines, sickens for a sight of one she must never see, for a voice it would be death to hear, the touch of a hand it were sin to clasp.

So she wanders about in her strange state of depression, pretending to enjoy the glorious green of the spring, and seeing only light and darkness, cold and desolation, in primrose banks and rippling streams.

Mr. Grebby is too preoccupied with his cattle and his land to notice the change in Eleanor, while Mrs. Grebby takes infinite pains to give her married daughter the best their house affords, and only remarks on her lack of appetite, at which she loudly laments.

"You 'aint eatin' anything, dearie," she says one morning at breakfast. "Try a tumbler of new milk to put some

strength into you. It's them towns as makes you pale and spiritless. I knows 'em. We was that done up after our visit to you and cousin Harriett, it was quite surprisin'. But law, how Pa did make me walk in London. Up them Monument steps, and down again before I'd got my breath, with poor Rover in charge of a policeman below, and everyone a laughing 'cause I was puffing so."

Eleanor forces a smile. She was watching for the post.

The moment the man's tread is heard on the gravel she starts up and runs to the door, dreading every day that Giddy may divulge her address.

She longs to write to Carol Quinton, but dare not. She knows she is too weak to run the risk.

There are two letters for her, one from Philip, the other from Mrs. Mounteagle.

She reads Giddy's first.

It is amusing and frivolous as usual. The last half, however, amazes Eleanor.

"I am going to be married," it says in the middle of a description of a new bonnet. "My future husband is a wealthy man and a general. Congratulate me! It will not be a long engagement, as he is seventy-five to-morrow, but loves with the ardour of a seventeen year old!" Talking of boys, I am asking Bertie to be best man. By this you will see all arrangements for the ceremony are being left entirely to my management. It will be costly and elaborate. My gown alone would have swallowed up dear Bertie's income. I have given him a splendid new watch to console him, as his was snatched last year at Epsom. I met my General at Lady MacDonald's. He moves in a very good set—gout permitting. Excuse my humour.—Your elated and strong-minded GIDDY.

"P.S.—Don't you think I am a noble woman? He is one eye short, which is rather a recommendation, but has been one of the handsomest men about town."

"How strange," thinks Eleanor. Then she throws the letter aside in disgust. "And very loathsome!" she adds tearing open Philip's envelope.

She reads it slowly at the breakfast table.

"Philip is coming this evening," she says.

Mr. and Mrs. Grebby clap their hands.

"Well, now, I'm right glad," they exclaim together. "We could see 'ow you missed 'im, dearie."

Eleanor feels uncomfortably guilty. What if they knew that her every thought was wandering to another!



"'Cause I was puffing so."

Already she has begun to try and piece the photograph together again, regretting her hasty action in the railway carriage. Before reaching Cophorne she had hidden the fragments safely in a corner of her dressing-bag. She hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry that Philip is coming. It will break the dull monotony of the day. At any rate she will get herself up to look as much like the old Eleanor as possible, though the thought of wandering with him through the haunts of past days is distasteful.

She knows it will please *him*, however; so, crushing her own feelings, she dons an old dress made by the village dressmaker, one which has hung in her wardrobe ever since she left home, then proceeds to search for the long disused sun bonnet.

The day is almost bright enough to excuse the picturesque headgear, eventually unearthed from the bottom of a tin trunk, and ironed by Eleanor's own hands.

She feels as if she were dressed up for amateur theatricals, and even denies herself the fashionable manner in which her hair is now arranged, going back to the simple style, before she knew London or Giddy Mounteagle.

"It certainly is becoming," she says; "beauty unadorned," viewing her charms in this rustic guise before a cracked mirror. "Yet I wonder what the Richmond girls would think of me if I walked on the Terrace, Sunday morning after church, dressed like this?"

She looks so pretty that her heart sinks at the thought that it is Philip, not Carol, for whom she has prepared.

As she comes down the stairs Mrs. Grebby meets her pale and trembling.

"What is the matter, mammy?" asks Eleanor, seeing that her mother is trying to gain breath for speech.

Mrs. Grebby puts her hand to her heart.

"There, there, child!" she says, "don't be frightened," while her legs seem sinking under her, and she grasps Eleanor's arm for support. "But the man from the post-office, 'e—e's brought a telegram for you."

"Anything wrong at home?" asks Mrs. Roche.

"Not that I know of—yet," continues the shaking woman; "it hasn't been opened."

Eleanor bursts out laughing, and the amused peal reassures Mrs. Grebby.

"Why, Ma, I get them nearly every day at Richmond, there is nothing to be alarmed at in a wire. Philip was going to let me know his train. I thought I told you."

She opens the message, and as she scans it her face falls.

"He is not coming," she says. "Too busy, and won't be able to manage it now. How like Philip! To let you get all ready for him and then fall."

It is more the annoyance of having dressed herself in vain than disappointment at not seeing him which vexes Eleanor.

"I dislike people throwing you over at the last moment; it is very inconsiderate and unkind. But I suppose he can't help it, poor fellow," with a touch of regret for her petulance. "I am very extravagant, Ma. I spend no end on clothes, though you wouldn't think it to look at me now. Philip just trots off to the City and makes the money, so it does not matter a bit."

Mr. Grebby expresses lavish sorrow at Mr. Roche's non-appearance, while Eleanor wanders out down the budding lanes towards the station, just as if Philip were coming after all, only there is neither tumult of sorrow or joy in her heart. She feels just indifferent to everything and everybody. The hedges are sprouting with young green. Surely the world is fair to all eyes but Eleanor's!

Her head is bent, she is gazing on the ground.

Suddenly a shadow crosses her path—the shadow of a man.

She looks up slowly, standing still, rooted to the spot.

A cold chill creeps through her veins, gradually changing to burning fire. She can neither speak nor move, the hedges seem to fly round, the trees spin, the twittering birds shriek!

"Carol!"

Eleanor bursts out laughing.



The word breaks from her lips at last like a cry.

Why has Philip failed her, why is he not here to save?

Someone is holding her hand in a passionate clasp, someone presses her cheeks, her lips! Is it a dream or reality, life or death?

The spring bursts suddenly into smiles, Nature laughs loudly; all the world is one wide pleasure field, a place to love, to die in for joy!

"Why did you run away?" he whispers, still holding her in his arms. "Why did you hide yourself from me, shut out the light from my days? It was cruel, Eleanor. Surely you knew I would have gone to the end of the world to find you, and you thought to evade me here."

"Fate has willed it otherwise. How did you discover me?"

Giddy Mounteagle gave me your address. I never gave her a moment's peace till she divulged it, poor woman."

A spark of anger flashes in Eleanor's love-laden eyes.

"The traitress!" she mutters under her breath.

"Ah! do not say that. She is happy herself, and I was so miserable, you were so miserable."

"How do you know?"

"I have read your heart like a book—it is mine and no other's. I mean to take it—cherish it—keep it—always!"

"You stole it from Philip—you stole it from me!" she cries, her voice shaken by fear and dread. "You see me as I am—weak, defenceless—loving you to my shame—my destruction. I am in your power body and soul—you have got my will as well—it is yours—all yours. Think for a moment, Carol, before you keep these stolen goods—what they cost—you and me. Pity me in this hopeless moment of surrender—make it less hard to part. Are we to lose everything? Think of your soul—and my soul. I believe that we both have them now in the palms of our hands—to cast into Hell—to lift up to Heaven! You should be the stronger. Remember what it is to be a man!"

"What is your ideal of poor mankind?" he asks hoarsely.

"To give—not take," replies Eleanor, in the words of Charles Kingsley, which rise suddenly as an inspiration to her tortured mind. "To serve—not rule. To nourish—not devour. To help—not crush. If need, to die—not live!"

"Then I will rise to your standard," he said boldly. "Eleanor, I will kill myself."

"How?" she asks.

"I care not; but to-day—this same hour—you will have driven me to my death!"

"Oh, Carol, you are cruel!" she sighs.

Then the words well into her brain, with fierce, upbraiding, horrible reality:

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow." She sees the faded touselled hair of the woman in the train, the dusty crape of her bonnet, the red upon her lips.

A cry escapes her, and sinking on the green bank by the roadside, Eleanor buries her face in the grass and sobs in uncontrollable anguish.

Carol cannot bear to watch her misery. He stoops down and gathers the little figure in his arms, straining her to his heart. He kisses dry the liquid eyes, and soothes the low deep sobs.

"I have decided," he says.

"And your choice, our fate, the end?" she asks breathlessly.

"To take," he replies, holding her fast, "not give back that which is mine, now and for ever. To rule

(if that is the harsh name you give my love), to devour, to crush, to live, Eleanor, not die."

The words sound like a shout of victory on the still air. They kindle a mad delight in the woman's stricken heart.

"We will leave this miserable country, where you are a captive to a man who cannot hold your love, yet calls himself 'husband.' We will go away, no matter where, since we shall be together. We have only our two selves to live for now. The world was created for us alone, we need remember nothing else, an Eden to love in and be happy. Oh! my darling, how bright I will make your life, as it never was before."

"You are right," says Eleanor slowly. "I have never known true happiness. I was very fond of Philip when I married him—the lukewarm affection that grows cold instantly in the chill air of disagreement or mistrust. The love which you have kindled in me is something I did not know or dream of. It is worth all else!"

Carol takes her wedding finger, holds it to his lips a moment, then places an embossed gold ring below the knuckle, with "Kismet" engraved upon it.

Eleanor gazes on the ring wistfully. The words are full of meaning to her just now.

"Kismet," she murmurs. "Only a true Mahomedan should use that expression."

She draws a cat's eye stone, that Philip gave her, from her hand, and offers it to Carol.

This is the last, the supreme act of surrender—that, more than all else, renounces for ever and ever Philip, honour, wifehood, and lays her low in the dust.



"I have never known true happiness."

They walk through the green fields hand in hand; they talk of things to be. The children coming home from school stare at Eleanor, and think how beautiful she is, wondering at the handsome stranger who gazes in her eyes, and whispers so low they cannot catch the words.

Yes, she looks just the same, as the evening tints fall with a rosy glow on her rich hair and simple sun-bonnet. How innocent she appears in the plain, homely attire, and that strange but glorious smile parting her lips. There are daisies under her feet, and blue sky over her head; love is in her heart, but hell is in her eyes.

Her eyes droop. The children cannot see—Hell!

(To be continued.)

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A

POSITIVE REMEDY FOR CORPULENCE

Any remedy that can be suggested as a cure or alleviation for stoutness will be heartily welcomed. We have recently received a well-written book, the author of which seems to know what he is talking about. It is entitled, "Corpulency, and the Cure" (256 pages), and is a cheap issue (only 6d), published by Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C. Our space will not do justice to this book; send for it yourself. It appears that Mr. Russell has submitted all kinds of proofs to the English Press. The editor of the *Tablet*, the Catholic organ, writes: "Mr. Russell does not give us the slightest loophole for a doubt as to the value of his cure, for in the most straightforward and matter-of-fact manner he submitted some hundreds of original and unsolicited testimonial letters for our perusal, and offered us plenty more if required. To assist him to make this remedy known, we think we cannot do better than publish quotations from some of the letters submitted. The first one, a marchioness, writes from Madrid: 'My son, Count—, has reduced his weight in twenty-two days 16 kilos—i.e., 34lb.' Another writes: 'So far (six weeks from the commencement of following your system) I have lost fully two stone in weight.' The next (a lady) writes: 'I am just half the size.' A fourth: 'I find it is successful in my case. I have lost 8lb. in weight since I commenced (two weeks).' Another writes: 'A reduction of 18lb. in a month is a great success.' A lady from Bournemouth writes: 'I feel much better, have less difficulty in breathing, and can walk about.' Again, a lady says: 'It reduced me considerably, not only in the body, but all over.' The author is very positive. He says: 'Step on a weighing-machine on Monday morning and again on Tuesday, and I guarantee that you have lost 2lb. in weight without the slightest harm, and vast improvement in health through ridding the system of unhealthy accumulations.'"—*Cork Herald*.

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